The Best Season on Record

BY CAPTAIN PENNELL-ELMHIRST.

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THE

BEST SEASON ON RECORD.

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THE

CREAM OF LEICESTERSHIRE.

ELEVEN SEASONS' SKIMMINGS.

By CAPT. PENNELL-ELMHIRST ("Brooksby.")

With Illustrations Coloured and Plain,
By JOHN STURGESS.

Copy #1 F. hunting E

"Forty to one against Bendigo!"

Frontispiece.

THE

BEST SEASON ON RECORD

(SELECTED AND REPUBLISHED FROM "THE FIELD")

BY

CAPTAIN PENNELL-ELMHIRST
("BROOKSBY")
AUTHOR OF "THE CREAM OF LEICESTERSHIRE"

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS, COLOURED AND PLAIN,

BY

JOHN STURGESS

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THE

BEST SEASON ON RECORD.

CHAPTER I.

A PREFACE AT HOME AND ABROAD.

FRIDAY, October 12th, was our first eleven o'clock meet, and the first muster in becoming force. The Quorn were at Gaddesby Hall; and a pleasant little field, still wearing the garb of sober autumn, accompanied the pack to Mr. Cheney's Spinnies. Business was meant from the very first—the young hounds were to have blood, and

such tiny coverts must of necessity throw most of the work outside their boundaries. And all the country round Gaddesby is very charming when hounds cross it—even before the leaves have fallen or the herbage has lost its summer luxuriance. The inclosures are all grass, the fences perhaps a little strong for nerves that are yet scarcely tuned to play. But the gates are ample and handy; and there were men enough to-day to ride through a rail or to point a ready alternative at any moment. Between Gaddesby and Queniboro' especially, gates provide a happy release from difficulties otherwise insuperable; for the thorn fences grow to a height above ambition or daring, in even their rarest and extremest forms. Now, besides being big and forbidding, they constituted so many leafy screens which constantly hid hounds from sight when only a field away; and our galloping in search was often very vague and haphazard. A straight fox and a strong scent would have lost us all more than once. But foxes do not always run straight in October (the happy succession of gallops two years ago forming the proving exception); and so, though we rode and jumped, loitered and shirked, for upwards of two hours on Friday afternoon, it was almost entirely within the little triangle of Gaddesby, Barkby Holt and Queniboro' (each point at about two miles apart from the others). The day was as hot and sultry as any of the indifferent harvest weather of the year; many horses still carried their summer coats, while many riders had gone so far in deference to the occasion as to swathe themselves at least in hunting waistcoats and winter flannel.

The morning draw was the plantation that is best entitled to the name of The Gaddesby Spinney; and among those who rode away from it, or appeared soon afterwards, were Mr. Coupland and Miss Webster, Mr. Merthyr and Lady Theodora Guest, Mr. and Mrs. Pennington, Mrs. Sloane Stanley, Capt. and Miss M. Campbell, General Chippindall, Capt. Grimstone, Messrs. Cheney, A. Barclay, Beaumont, Middleton, Alston, Thornhill, O. Paget, J. Cradock, G. Webster, R. Martin, with perhaps a dozen others—supplemented by a considerable detachment of grooms, many of whom were zealously employed for the benefit of the farmers in schooling horses that long ago cost their masters the price at all events of perfection.

The fox that took them hence to break the ice (a most inapplicable parallel in such weather) with five hot minutes to the village—and to die in its outskirts—was old and fat as many a chosen stag of Exmoor. He would have little of the open country—though that little sufficed to put men and horses more at ease. A few blind fences had been jumped; hounds had been seen to run; and never a casualty had yet befallen.

All that happened in the afternoon might in midwinter be served up in a couple of lines—though it seemed a full afternoon of merriment and pleasant sport to-day. A second fox was set going from another of Mr. Cheney's Spinnies (the one on the hillside opposite Gaddesby Village); and a roundabout, but very enjoyable hunt, went on for a long time before this second old fox was brought to hand. At first starting men rode and

hounds ran as if a great gallop were in prospect—the former taking plunge after plunge over the dark green fences through which the latter had disappeared from sight. Three times they started thus and three times matters steadied down to quiet hunting—Firr and the Quorn ladies sticking to their fox through all difficulties, till about three o'clock they had him in hand near the point from which he had started.

The turf just now is in admirable order; rich and soft as velvet, after recent autumnal showers. Would that it could continue so through the five months which to us constitute the heart of the year, the soul of our fun! Now we gaily skim the surface; now we are shot up and over with the easiest effort of a good bold horse. By and by progress may be a deep slow labour; every jump a heavy trial—while hounds may be flitting phantoms, and we, the lesser fry, become lost in the shoal of struggling comrades.

It is too early to say definitely who will be at Melton for the winter. Many houses are taken, but several rumours of coming visitors have yet to be realized. Mr. Younger is obliged to give up hunting, and Craven Lodge will probably change hands—while his beautiful stud of horses is to be dispersed at Tattersall's on the 29th instant. Baggrave Hall is let to Mr. Trew; and Billesdon Coplow of ancient renown to Mr. Alston.

THE BICESTER.

Seventeen minutes with the Bicester. Only a trifle, perhaps—but a trifle fast and sweet, and quite the best fun that I at least have yet encountered. By no means the pick of their country, they said, and one might well believe it. For, even after a single night's soaking, the ploughs rode deep and sticky, the grass at the same time was hard, lumpy and greasy, while many of the fences are broad, blind doubles of the most indefinite kind. Just the country in fact to bring a cropper, and to allow of that cropper being a rough and disagreeable one. Still, the fall was far more likely to come when you were going slow—cautiously creeping and feeling your way—than in the swing of a merry gallop, with the cry of hounds stringing each nerve of horse and rider to its utmost (at least so it seemed to one on whom the conclusion chanced to be most fully forced).

Bletchington and Kirklington—the two beautiful estates of Lord Valentia and Sir Henry Dashwood respectively, and immediately adjoining each other—were the scene of all the earlier work and play of the day; and at least forty horsemen sauntered for some hours amid the green glades and brightly-changing woods of these picturesque domains. Who were all these representatives of the Hunt, it would be impossible for me as a casual wanderer to say. But the following few I believe I am safe in naming as taking their part in

the day, viz., The Master (Viscount Valentia), Lord Henry Bentinck, Col. Molyneux, Messrs. Lambton, Harter, Leigh, Harrison, Griffith, Dewar, De Vasc, &c.

The meet had been Weston Peat Pits (about a dozen miles from Oxford); and three foxes had been set afoot during the morning. The hospitable portals of Bletchington were then thrown open; and when a fresh start was made, it was with a marked and general improvement of appearances and weather. Weston Wood lies on the lower flat beneath Bletchington; two o'clock was the time; a fox was up as soon as hounds were in; the whip viewed him away at once over the road; the pack was out in a moment; and the field was brisk and lively as a field could be. Down the brookside meadow raced the Bicester ladies (as pretty and even a pack as man might wish to see); the brook divided a heavy plough from the gayer grass; men who knew their whereabouts took the plough, and if Ignorance did not quickly accept the lead, he was likely enough soon to be floundering in that marshy brook. For with strange perversity Reynard quickly changed over to the newly turned arable—and the brook was a class of its own—running under a bank of reeds, and supplemented by a ditch beyond. Truly they waste a great deal of ground in Bicestershire when they build, or neglect, their fences in such needless complication. Is it as a protest against this, think you, that, as I am told, such a very small number of the Oxford undergraduates nowadays lend their countenance to fox hunting? Surely not.

Another wood was in front. At least it looked like

one. But hounds swung past it at once; and, leaving the rough deep plough behind, emerged on to a succession of firm green fields. A strong ash pole was bound high across the only gap in a first tall bullfinch—and had not the whip and some generous bystander flung their combined weight on it till it broke, the rest of the scurry might have been a blank page to us all. Then the railway, with its two white gates opening like magic to the Sesame of the hound music. Blessed platelayer! Gladly would we tip you—had we time and had we money. Hounds are driving forward to a screaming scent; horses are stretched to their utmost; and October condition is beginning to speak in language unmistakable. Open water glitters in front—maybe a very Jordan—and they take but little notice of water in these parts. Ah, 'tis but an eight foot stream that would not frighten us even in Leicestershire—and we may follow the huntsman, Colonel Molyneux, and Lord Henry Bentinck as nearly as we can. For to cling to the huntsman's skirts—while country and courage serve you—is no bad recipe for seeing a run in a strange land. The huntsman is not likely to know anything of the kindly part he is thus fulfilling; and on the whole I should say it may be as well not to ask his formal permission, still less that of his master. But, depend upon it, he is, in any country and quite nine times out of ten, as near to hounds as anyone should be, and thus if you can keep him in sight, you are pretty certain to see a good deal of the sport.

Scarcely, now, was the little brook crossed, when

hounds bent sharply and suddenly back to the left, and soon recrossed the railway. All chance of a point, all hope of a long straight run were gone; but the pack was still driving merrily. The hunt-servants readily produced a key, and the railway scarce hindered a moment. The next double was a sort of overgrown earthwork—looking, probably, ten times more formidable now under its shroud of bramble leaf and tangle than when Christmas shall show it out in its naked ugliness. But Oxfordshire horses can decipher a ditch and a double ditch of the most misty tracing; so Stovin and his following left it behind without loss of time or numbers. A gateway girthdeep with overnight flood let them through another stout double; and soon, heated and panting, they were pushing through a narrow wood which the pack had already pierced. A few more fields, a few more gates—then to ground in Weston village—a circle almost completed—my little story told. Just time then to catch the train. Just time now to save the post.

CHAPTER II.

THE LEAF ON THE THORN.

FRIDAY, October 19.—A wet chilly day that must have been detestable for grouse or partridge driving, impossible for covert shooting, hateful at Sandown, and more miserable than all indoors. Yet for foxhunting it was quite passable, even before the vigour and comfort of the chase began. Afterwards, rain mattered nothing, and cold had no place—in a glowing frame and heart warmed to gladness. We shivered awhile in the morning, and we shrank under tree shelter where any was to be had—moved by the same instinct that turns a terrier into an aspen leaf as readily when his skin is wet in summer as on the coldest day in winter. For we are sybaritish still after our summer nothingness—have not even arrived at the sensation of a new pink soaking out its first rich beauty in clammy coldness down our ribs—have not yet trudged homeward in tight stiff tops, as lamely as the good horse limping beside us. All things are by comparison—and a happy heart is it that keeps a granary of ill memories for ready use in bettering the present. There are drawbacks, possibly, to October hunting; but there are very many points in its favour.

"The country is surely very blind!" invariably follows the interrogatory of the friend in the street as to "what sport are you having?" Very blind it is, undoubtedly; but let not him and others delude themselves that they will find the ditches all cut and cleaned for them by November. There will be fewer leaves on the hedges—and already our horses have to pick a more meagre luncheon from them than they found ready to hand a week ago. But the ditches are as grasscovered and indistinguishable as ever; and so, if memory and precedent are not deceiving me, they will in a great measure continue to be till winter snow has played its part. Meanwhile this very bugbear of "blindness" immensely facilitates riding for those who will try it. For instance, on this Friday in question we could never have kept company with hounds along the stiff line they travelled, had there been a crowd—not because the fences were particularly blind, but because they were so strong that getting over them here and there, and galloping for gates as often as was necessary, would have been a choking and constantly disappointing process for a mass of horsemen. Timber is just as easy to see now as at any other time—and much easier to jump, for a horse now takes off sound and probably springy ground. But then timber, of course, generally occurs in isolated patches, where a tree has been felled out of the hedgerow, or a gap has been repaired. At least it is so in our blessed shire and its neighbours. Each flight of rails of this kind only admits of one horse and rider at a time; and, likely enough, constitutes the only jumpable place

in a lofty bullfinch. So it is easy to understand that the prolonged detention of the many comrades, to whose eventual coming we look forward with true and glad anticipation, is not yet felt to be privation unalloyed. Shooting (to the delights of which even the most rabid of foxhunters need not be callous) is never, in the fashion of the day and the current phases of the sport, found more pleasantly than in the months of October and November. So 'tis allowable to bid them *Carpe diem*. And yet, methinks, I would rather have been in a wet saddle on Friday than in a wet butt or even at a hot corner. "Chill October" may be a reality; but *cold* October is an inapplicable term. An old shooting coat will turn an astonishing amount of rain; a billycock is a much more suitable incumbrance in wet weather than a tall hat; rough cords are much pleasanter when soaked through and through than soapy leathers (and far less likely to slip you out of your saddle into a ditch); and—not the smallest consideration of all to the careful and impecunious—you are not forced to choose between two alternative but equally distasteful courses, viz., either to submit a good hunting kit to the destructive influences of a thorough wetting, or to brave public opinion and set self-respect at defiance by appearing among your fellow-men the one ill-clad ruffian of the party.

The best of this Friday was comprised in fifty minutes of the afternoon. By one o'clock there could scarcely have been a dry skin among Mr. Coupland's fifty followers, except in the case of two or three who clung

to the worse discomfort of heavy waterproofs. Already some of the venturesome had been entrapped in the gardens and orchards of Barkby Village, while a bad fox twisted out of scent. But a good number of dripping sportsmen were still at hand when the run began from the Long Spinney at Scraptoft. To follow the chase on paper through all its deviations would be unprofitable and uninteresting. To begin with, however, we were soon set going from the laurels of Scraptoft Hall to the outskirts of Keyham Village—a line that at any time takes some doing, and that now was only to be done by means of persistent cunning and the most artful shirking. Hounds fortunately did not move fast enough to prohibit such ignoble measures; and so we could keep them in sight, while they left Keyham to the right, and reached the Beeby Brook. Turning here to the right, the pack at once quickened the pace, and ran the brookside for the next ten minutes—leaving Hungerton Foxholes half a field to the left, and checking only for a moment when crossing the road just before reaching it. A beautiful grass valley is this (and, indeed, all hitherto had been grass, with the exception only of a couple of small stubble fields), and strongly fenced besides. But where gates did not favour, there were clean post-and-rails to offer their help; and so men made their way with little difficulty and with hearty zest. Very pretty hound work carried them on by Ingarsby station, and forward till Houghton spire was close in front. Then a holloa, possibly on a fresh fox, took them back by Mr. Carver's Spinney—and soon afterwards hounds were running round and round

the Coplow (or rather the covert of Botany Bay) after two or three different foxes. The ride home was not a very comfortable sequel; but what mattered that after a run so early and in itself so pretty? Why does early lamb tempt the epicure? Why do fair ladies prefer rather to anticipate a fashion than to incur the reproach of being behind it? Why is there charm in spring; and why is there tenfold power in a passion re-asserted? This is our spring and our re-awakening. And very very glad were we now that we had scorned the promptings of our craven heart—bidding us turn homeward at midday when the weather was at its worst.

Wednesday last, October 24th, brought the Belvoir to Clawson Thorns—and brought also the lamentable news that Gillard had broken his leg over-night. The casualty, it seems, was due to the upsetting of the hound van, in which it is customary to carry the pack to and from work on the Lincolnshire side. One of the horses shied across the road when descending a hill close at home; and the van tilted over against the bank at the side. The whole staff, and Champion the Duke of Richmond's huntsman, were shot into the road; but Gillard, who sustained a fracture of the small bone of a leg and a severe sprain of an ankle, was the only one of the party hurt. The hounds of course were rolled over in a mass; but it is said that not one of them was the worse for it. Very naturally, the greatest sympathy is widely expressed for the huntsman, whose misfortune at such a time is also as serious a matter to others as it is grievous to him. A bed of sickness and pain in November must indeed be the lot of

Tantalus to a man who should be carrying the horn with such a pack.

Wednesday's was a lovely morning—if it led neither to good news nor to great sport. Bright, cool and autumnal, with the grass sparkling everywhere with glistening dewdrops, and trees and hedges radiant with every hue from darkest green to ruddiest orange. Never was a canter to covert accomplished under pleasanter auspices, never were daydreams more freely and happily prompted. The roadside turf seemed to spring to the hoofstroke; the sharp air fanned one's cheeks into a glow and filled one's lungs with life—while the very magpies chattered two by two in merry augury.

Ten o'clock was the trysting time at Clawson Thorns; and only a slender company assembled to see what treasures the casket might contain. For neither this covert, Holwell Mouth, nor Old Hills had yet been drawn—and rumour had it that the first and last contained quite two litters apiece. Nor was rumour on this occasion far beyond the mark. Each held at least three or four brace of foxes—and the day was quite a cubhunting, or cubkilling, one. One fat innocent paid the penalty in Clawson Thorns; and two fell victims in the wooded basin of Old Hills—where for a time every hound seemed to be running his own fox. The neighbourhood is evidently essentially foxhunting. Labourers from the fields, and red-dusted workers from the Holwell ironpits (for alas, iron is now found only too plentifully even in Leicestershire), trooped up by scores, to form a boisterous and appreciative audience round the

amphitheatre of Old Hills—which they undoubtedly regard as coming by every right under their own protectorate, in the interests of civilisation and of sport. The neutral covert of Holwell Mouth, it should be mentioned, had not held a fox: but this will be of the less consequence with two such well stocked fastnesses on either side. Arthur, the first whip and Gillard's *locum tenens*, had no other port of call set down in his sailing orders. Besides which, by this time his saddle was as thickly hung with fox-heads as that of a warrener's pony with rabbits. However the little Scalford Spinney was close by. There might be a fox there—and we have many a cheery memory linked with this little spot. There *was* a fox—and a bold old gentleman too. But we did not have a run; for hounds were soon once more among the cubs of Old Hills.

Quite the leader, and quite one of the most appreciative members, of the little party who watched the day's proceedings was the Rev. — Bullen of Eastwell, now entering on his eightieth season with hounds—his first serious fall having taken place in his second season with his father's pack in Norfolk, only seventy-nine years ago, when he dislocated his knee. Wednesday last was his second day in the week; and, to all appearance (and certainly if the good wishes of hundreds avail anything) he will stand work for years to come. Within the last very few winters he has ridden really hard across country. Even now his face of keen enjoyment as hounds drive their fox through covert is a refreshing and admirable sight. He was present at Salamanca; and he went

through the retreat from Burgos. See what foxhunting can do towards prolonging health and life!

Another veteran was there too, of humbler degree, and whose past history is linked with less stirring events—but whose presence in the hunting field was almost an equally strong protest against the power of the arch enemy Time. This venerable foxhunter hails from the village of Long Clawson; and cannot have lived less than the three score and ten of man's allotted allowance. During the years of my brief experience I have never missed seeing this grizzly veteran at the covertside, whenever hounds have met in his immediate neighbourhood; and his mount has been the same since I first knew him. An acquaintance cemented by such opportunities of intercourse led me to risk the charge of impertinence and to inquire how long he had been carried by the same animal. "Fourteen seasons," he promptly answered, "and he'll carry me, I hope, a good many more yet." The sanguine nature of the reply will, I trust, be found justified by events—and the old man and his tiny donkey in attendance on the Duke's hounds for years to come.

CHAPTER III.

AN AUTUMN GALLOP.

THE last Friday in October was signalised by as fast and cheery a gallop as is likely to mark the Quorn season '83 '84. Thirty flying minutes from Gaddesby Spinney, over some of the prettiest ground of the Hunt, and with just enough people for the requirements of good fellowship. A hundred might have ridden to hounds, without getting in each other's way—so fair, open, and roomy was the country of to-day.

There are times when one should write and there are times when the pen seems loaded with lead—as there are times, with most of us, when the tongue must fling, and other times (and those possibly the most inconvenient) when the tongue is clogged and intellect is stubbornly dull. The hour for telling a gallop is, perhaps, while the spirit is still aflame, before a night's unconsciousness has drifted the brain elsewhere, and, much more, before other pursuits have occupied the mind or the platitude of daily life has achieved a reaction almost approaching sadness. To-morrow we shall no longer live in the ride, no longer breathe excitement, no longer be moving cheek by jowl

with comrades as jovially earnest—as madly intent as (may I say?) you and I, reader. I would put you in the middle of the scurry forthwith, and send you cramming and spurring in pursuit of these lithesome ladies at once—but that every tale must have its beginning, its characters however few, its events however tamed by fact, and its sequel however ordinary. Wherever you have been of late, you know of the soft moist days that characterised the latter half of October. The Friday in question was a full example—drizzly and almost chilly as one stood still; wet, hot, and choking as one galloped and jumped. A few people had been at Ashby pastures when hounds were cast into it at ten o'clock; a good many more had turned up at their leisure during the morning—while hounds were fighting against a weak scent among falling leaves in covert, and doing their best and liveliest against shortrunning foxes outside.

Gaddesby Spinney is a little copse, with the name of which my kindly readers must be only too familiar—for does it not recur as regularly and almost as profusely, autumn after autumn, as the falling of the leaf? Distinct amongst Mr. Cheney's other, and equally valued, patches of covert in the neighbourhood, the plantation that lies about half a mile westward of the village retains the denomination. And some thirty individuals, all darkly dressed and dripping, clustered at its edge in the early afternoon of Friday. The old sweet sound! *Hark* to it, old ladies! The covert's a tiny one; a fox is a fact, a scent is more than likely, and a gallop ought to be a certainty. Out flashes the fact—No, tally-ho, back! and

may Tom Mooney's ghost haunt the fool on foot at the corner! Ah, but that slip back was only a *ruse;* already they are screaming away at the end of the covert opposite the village; and now you may kick in and out of the rough ridge-and-furrow as fast as you can. By virtue of habit the timekeepers dive at their fobs. "One-thirty by my old clock, anything you like by the time—but help me remember one-thirty."

"A moment, ONE moment, please gentlemen!"—and the ladies come bundling out, among and behind the little throng that has whisked all too hastily round to the holloa. Twenty yards from the covert is a tall thorn fence, still bearing, in gorgeous red and faded green, the full foliage of summer. In a second or two every hound has dived noisily through the gaudy screen; and the music moves lustily on—but whither the pack may be pointing is a matter of vaguest guess. The lengthy and impenetrable curtain must be outflanked one way or the other. Please yourself whether you gallop back or gallop on. Choosing onward, you will reach the Gaddesby road, and cut off the pack if it bends to the right. Slip back and you make it safe should it turn to the left. Firr, with a trusting majority after him, takes the latter course. Supposing you are for once misguided enough to put more faith in your own instinct than in that of the huntsman, you soon find yourself hammering the road, with the invisible chorus gradually waxing fainter—while the stroke of your gallop and the beat of your own heart grow faster and faster. Leftward they've turned, by all that's brief in life and deceptive in hope! Easy

enough—and often convenient enough—it is to get into a broad road; but to leave it (as pulpit and experience have taught us all our lives) is a very different task. So for a long quarter of a mile never an outlet presents itself. A gate at last—and off to the left the gleam of a white hound darting through the second fence away. Those two fences and two great furrowed fields are made up as quickly as hot anxiety and a big striding horse can manage. In the third the two streams reunite; and we are galloping in the train of the huntsman's party. Amid these tight little meadows and their thick leafy hedges you will see nothing of hounds unless you are on their backs. But the single red coat is the best of beacons, as it flickers brightly over each intervening barrier, or flashes like a meteor across some rising ground. This may help you to cut into the grassy lane of the Gaddesby and Brooksby bridle road, and to catch the swinging handgate that opens into the wide Brooksby pastures—while Mr. Alfred Brocklehurst, on the best of timber jumpers, launches over the rails by the side, and the voice of the less venturesome pleads, Do as you would be done by and keep it open for me. Twenty couple, young and old, are driving down the wide green slope—the old ladies straining madly on the ravishing scent, the youngsters catching the new excitement that they have never felt to the full before. We ought to know this bridle path, and should have learned to open its easy gates ere now. But the three leaders find no time nor need to stop—so why should reader and I? The fence in the valley is but a flying trifle; though

little clue can we gather of its make and width till we see that Mr. H. T. Barclay is safely landed—and we wonder why his horse should have taken no note of the grass-grown rivulet beyond, which ours emphasized with so pronounced a peck on his knees and nose. Up the brow the next is a fair, pleasant jump, and so is the following one. But "Ware wire!" sends a chill down our backbone as we approach the third—and right gladly do we mark the pack turning along the dreaded barrier. At this time of year above all others is wire our phantom, too often our embodied, enemy. Not only is the tight stretched strand far more difficult to perceive through the leafy branches of October, but the fat stock has not yet found a market, and the farmers are loth to weaken their fences too soon. Year by year, however, we gladly and thankfully notice a marked diminution, even during the summer, in the quantity of wire set to guard the fences of the Midlands. It is found to be so fruitful of injury to cattle, so easily knocked out of order, and withal so indifferent a protection against the bull-headed pertinacity of a restless shorthorn, that its apparent economy is no longer a recommendation, and very few lines of wire fencing are now either fresh set or renewed. Soon may the old-fashioned oxer again reign paramount, to invite or repel with its rugged honesty—according to the measure and prompting of our years (a pun would be a vile thing even in the cause of pusillanimity) and our discretion. But the wire in question stretches only half the breadth of the field; and with the regard for their followers that so constantly characterised the movements

of fox and hounds throughout this merry gallop, they now strike through the hedge almost exactly where the metal ends—and while we behind gasp "Wire," they in front charge a hole in the fence, and sweep down the wide stretching pasture in full content. Many a gallop have I ridden in Leicestershire (as I e'en hope to do again)—and have seen hounds and horses go away from me more often than I should like to say—but never has the pace seemed better than now. Fast horses are galloping their utmost on the fairest turf, an easy fence comes perhaps in half a mile of galloping, gates are either standing open or fly back at once to the crop—and yet the pack is going all too fast for us unwilling laggards, till a wandering shepherd throws a chance turn in our favour. Now we cross the "Melton and Leicester turnpike," midway between Rearsby and Brooksby; now we have worked through a few pumping acres of newly turned arable, and now we are pushing up the big grass field for the covert of Bleakmore, marvelling why the turf seems less elastic, and the stride of our horse less conformable with ridge and furrow, than only a few brief minutes ago. Yes, lungs and muscle are never in autumn what they may be after Christmas—and 'tis only the commencement of the lesson yet. Fondly we hug ourselves that Bleakmore is just in front; and that in another minute we shall be on foot beside our fat steeds—mopping our foreheads with gusto, and flinging our tongues in noisy exuberant accord on the subject of the pleasant scurry just over. Not yet. For the merry ladies race onwards along the ridge

—leaving Bleakmore and the railway below them on the right. How now for your "honest oxer"? Here it is in its most laudable ruggedness—and, in plain Saxon, an ugly beast it is too. The rail on the take-off side is no excuse for the qualm that stabs you like the conscience of a schoolboy caught cribbing his task. But the high laid-fence shows its strong teeth e'en through the heavy foliage; a ditch of unknown dimensions lies beyond; there is a whisper, too, of wire; and any number of predecessors are not likely to bring things to a much lower level. The huntsman quickly makes up his mind to the inevitable; but his horse (brilliantly as he carries him throughout) on this occasion whips round to take time for a second thought. Mr. Brocklehurst clears the whole difficulty a few yards to the right, while the Cambridgeshire hero takes the office from Firr, and makes a bold bid for victory. Post and rails, hedge and ditch, are covered gallantly. But beyond them all, and visible only from mid air, glistens another stout ox rail. "Forty to one against Bendigo!" shouts his familiar friend as he himself lands in safety. But the only response to the liberal offer is a loud cracking of timber, a heavy flounder and another good man fallen on the turf. Matters are a little simpler now; and after seeing the huntsman, Captain O'Neal, Mr. Peake, Mr. Cradock, Mr. Alston, and two or three others, surmount the less complicated difficulty, reader and I too may pull ourselves together, put our panting beast through the same process—by help of knee and heel against his well-furnished sides — and even reach the others as, after

another half mile of grass, they huddle at a bridlegate by Rearsby. The fox has swung to the left, again across the turnpike; but with such a scent as there is to day, the pack falters neither on road nor plough, but drives forward over the little fields behind the village, whether they happen to be eddish or arable. Scarcely so with their followers. The *drive* is well-nigh spent, the steel is out of the iron, and the oil is all but burned out. A horse will gallop in a mechanical sort of way long after the power to jump has left him. A very limited experience with the symptoms suffices to teach us where such a stage has been reached; also that a mere mechanical stride is of little use against a strong top binder. It by no means follows that the faculty of appreciation adds greatly to our enjoyment at such moments. I confess to its having a very contrary effect upon my frail nerves—and I venture to assert, by the way, that the one great drawback to the pleasures of steeplechase jockeyship lies in the frequent necessity of riding a beaten horse home. Now, however, there are gates and gaps to help us. Again we are on the grass, and at the pace hounds are running they must surely catch a view in another minute or two. A shepherd—with more than the acumen or consideration of his race, holding his colley in his arms — declares "the fox is nobbut a hoondred ya-ards afore 'em!" the while he fumbles at an unwilling gate, and we pant and ejaculate, and hope there is no more jumping to be done. "Forrard, little bitches," rings cheerily out as the pack glides up the hedgeside, and we follow hurriedly to the

corner—trusting that, as hitherto, providence, and enlightened agriculture will have provided free means of egress from field to field. Yes, there's a nice stile for the use of labourers and for people on foot—and well used it evidently is, for the approach to it is worn into a hole, and slimy clay has taken the place of grass. Beyond this, the corner is a veritable *cul de sac;* for lofty bullfinches, of an earlier generation, enclose either flank—and despair settles upon our soul.

If you, reader, happen to have hunted in the Pytchley country some twenty years ago, when that flying huntsman, and most rapid yet laconic of talkers, Charles Pain, was in his prime, you may remember an oft quoted incident that eminently illustrated the man. Reaching a certain corner, from which the only apparent escape was retreat—(the last alternative that ever occurred to his mind) he found another hard rider just turning reluctantly away. Charles Pain was one who suited his words to his actions, the latter being quite as rapid and ready as the former—so, taking his horse short by the head, he pursued his way without further ado, accompanying and explaining his progress only with a single running sentence, "Will do, will do—must do, must do; d—d woolly place—hold up, ye beggar—hey bitch!" Men who knew him in those days will easily fill in for themselves the rapidity of the jerky utterances, and the high treble pitch to which the last syllable would raise him. Alas for the feelings of him who had turned aside; alas for the plight of those who would ride to his lead! Think you they found their situation any more palatable

than ours now—Firr's whitelegged bay having shown us all a clean pair of heels—our fox said to be dead beat, and our horses undoubtedly so? Well, "must do, must do"—and Kismet is kind to the next three—*too* kind, for they do nothing to mend matters for those who have

"LEFT LIKE A BULL IN A POUND."

yet to come. No. 4 has already declared loudly that he cannot, nay, that he *will not;* for that

> The heart of his good horse
> Was nigh to burst with violence of the beat,
> And so perforce he stayed, and overtaken spoke.

But finding himself left like a bull in a pound, and that neither Tennyson nor any other man is likely to help him out, unless he helps himself, he too puts his head down and goes for the opening—if so it might be called. It has every claim to the title when he has done with it;

for half a ton of beaten horse-flesh will splinter almost any top-bar in the county, that has been rained upon for more than a single year (and this is one of the reasons for our constant assertion that big horses are better than little ones, to carry us in Leicestershire). That such a result, however, cannot always be attained without a certain concussion was, he tells me, instanced in the query of his groom that night—"Wasn't it close at home as you fell, sir? I thought as the colour of the dirt on the chestnut's head looked as if it were."

Meanwhile the hounds have encountered their first momentary check—their fox having been driven almost back among them by two men who shouted in his very face. But for this they must have pulled him down in a few more fields. Now they of course flash beyond the point; recover themselves, however, and the line, very quickly; but lose a very vital half minute. By this time the circle is nearly completed: and the boundary brook between the Gaddesby and Brooksby parishes is reached where rails must be torn down, while hounds go on alone. Again we are on the Brooksby manor; again hounds are going faster than we can, and we are going very much faster than our horses. Indeed, as Who-hoop sounds over a drain, at the road immediately above the hall, only the Master and his man are there at the moment to give it—"the field in varied plight arriving as best they can." We shall see nothing faster, and we may see very few things better this year. I have made a long story of these thirty minutes. But *The Field* is read by many a man who for awhile can only get his

hunting on paper. To him I need make no apology. The many who may be enjoying equal sport elsewhere, have their own recent experiences to feast upon. It may not be my fortune—very possibly will not be—to find even such material as the above for pen or for personal pleasure for some time to come. Why should I not be allowed to make the most of it now? Is there much profanity in the old Latin's sentiment below? Few of us, to whom the vicissitudes of life past and present are familiar, will be likely to assert that there is.

Happy the man, and happy he alone,
He who can call to-day his own.
He who, secure within, can say,
To-morrow, do thy worst, for I have lived to-day.

Be fair or foul, or rain or shine,
The joys I have possessed, in spite of Fate, are mine.
Not Heaven itself upon the past has power,
But what has been, has been, and I have had my hour.

CHAPTER IV.

THE OPENING DAY.

N Monday, November 5th, the season was, according to time-honoured custom, formally inaugurated at Kirby Gate. As with our birthdays, each recurring occasion brings a less sense of self-congratulation than the one before. Not that each opening meet is not in itself a welcome event—but there is the afterthought that another item has been entered against our very limited credit, and the account cannot go on for ever. Never mind—"Chal'k it up! Chal'k it up!" Mynheer of the scythe and hourglass. Rip Van Winkle never troubled himself about his score—nor recked the leap of Time. Why should we?

There is always much that is bright and cheerful at Kirby Gate. The first blush of pink, the first glitter of snowy buckskin, lend a gaiety to the scene, that alone is refreshing and inspiriting. That the gathering is attractive as a show, is amply evinced by the regularity with which it is brought to do duty as an annual picnic for Leicester and the country round. So, besides their doing what is right by themselves and comrades in bringing their talents to bear upon the toilet of the day, the brave gentlemen who take part in the pageant are really performing a public duty, viz., popularising fox-hunting and maintaining its place in public esteem. What would the Lord Mayor be, but for the Lord Mayor's Show? Why is the sway of an Indian prince, however cruel and tyrannical, always far more popular with the multitude than the cold even justice of the British rule? Simply on account of the glitter and show ever associated with the presence of an Eastern potentate. In like manner the gay colouring and bright surroundings of foxhunting do quite as much towards keeping it in favour as any of the more sterling advantages it can boast, or even the claims of old custom that it can urge. The whole countryside delight in viewing the passing pageantry of the chase, and its brilliantly clad votaries are welcomed everywhere. A farmer will take pride and pleasure in the passage of the gay throng across his land, who would give anything but a cordial welcome to a bevy of riders merely loosing off their superfluous energy over his farm.

A notice of a Kirby Gate meet would be altogether imperfect without some mention, however incomplete, of those present. Besides many strangers from a distance, there were on horseback, Mr. Coupland and Miss Webster, Capt. and Mrs. Ashton, Mr. and Mrs. Pennington, Mr. H., Mrs., and Miss Story, Mr. W. and Miss Chaplin and Mrs. Moore, Mr. and Mrs. Clifford Chaplin, Mr. Ernest Chaplin, Capt. and Mrs. Molyneux, Mrs. Robertson, Miss Paget, Miss Livingston, Miss Banning, Duke of Portland, Lords Manners and Newark, Sir Frederick Fowke, Sir Arthur Scott, Major-General Chippindall, Colonel Gosling, Capts. Barclay, Grimston, Campbell, Henry, Hill-Trevor, O'Neil, Whitmore, Goodchild, Boyce, Starkie, Fowke, Jacobson, Messrs. A. C. Barclay, H. Boden, A. Brocklehurst, Baldock, Beaumont, Bankart, Clayton, Cochrane, Creyke, Conant, Campbell, Custance, Fowke, Farnham, Gleadow, Graham, L. Johnstone, R. W. Johnson (his thirty-second attendance), Knowles, Lubbock, Langmore, Manners, Martin, Miles, Parker, O. Paget, G. Paget, Pochin, Peake, Powell, Rose, Seabrooke, Trew, G. Webster, Wade, Fox, Sykes, Brewitt, Simpkin, Smith, Morris, &c., &c.

With pleasant weather, and a right good day's sport, the Quorn never opened their season more auspiciously. Excellent sport indeed they had had for a fortnight previous; but the first Monday in November is their gala day; and is—why I cannot tell—the earliest occasion on which more than half their regular followers can be induced to attend, This matter of toilet can possess no great charms for them—certainly after their

first completed season. The old soldier wears his uniform only when duty compels him; the last-joined ensign (or whatever answers to him in a territorial cadre) is never happy out of it. No. They would seem to regulate their arrival by some such hidden law as governs the coming of the woodcocks—reducing it to practice in the form of the "first Monday in November," much as the latter may be expected with the first north-east wind in the month. I fear that these November sportsmen find the fences anything but clear of darkening leaf and tangled grass even now. As a matter of fact, the country is little less blind than ever; while the ground is rapidly becoming deep and holding—the latter condition being really a much more fruitful cause of grief than the former.

But there were few falls to-day, very much fewer than I remember on the certain number of previous occasions that it has been my luck to attend at Kirby Gate—a fact that may, perhaps, be attributed to the comparatively slender proportion of the field that saw either of the runs of the day. Let me get on at once to history. A fox had been found—or, as is usually the case at Gartree Hill, whereat another large crowd always assembles long before the long procession of horsemen and carriages winds into sight, found *himself*—before hounds were in covert.

So the horn was going at the foot of the hill before half the cavalcade had debouched from the lane; and for all the start they got they might as well have remained at Kirby Gate. Yet, as the hunt worked slowly over

the Burton Flat, and round by Leesthorpe, it was easy enough for one and all to reach the hounds during the next quarter of an hour.

The vigour and life of the run began when the fox was suddenly headed and driven back among hounds, so that they coursed him for his life across two fields into the laurels of Dalby Hall—the leaders straining at his very brush, and even snapping at him as he jumped the garden wall. Once round the shrubs and grounds they drove him virulently—and this bursting struggle it was, no doubt, that eventually cost him his brush. The many who know Dalby Hall, and have helped at any time to reap the fruits of Mr. Hartopp's goodwill as testified to three different hunts, know well enough how difficult it often is to circumvent that extensive enclosure of garden and pleasure ground, covering the side and crest of a hill, and attracting for awhile almost every fox found in its vicinity. Now the field hurried round its outskirts, expecting to meet the hounds beyond. Anon they would have hurried back again; but that the narrow lane became choked and impassable. At this fatal moment Reynard broke away at the point he had entered. The wind blew freshly thither, and carried off any holloas that may have announced his exit; some of the pack came away, still almost at his brush, the rest followed by instinct; and Firr, under the influence of some similar motive power, sallied forth too as the tail hounds were leaving the laurels. Crossing the road below Wheathills, the lengthened pack took to the grass at a pace that for some fields forbade the possibility of its getting together,

or of the few horsemen at hand achieving more than just to keep it in sight. Mr. G. Pochin happened to be posted where they left the road; the huntsman came within range as they topped the hill whereon stood the Grand Stand of the last National Hunt Chases; and a small party—of whom, if I am not mistaken, General Chippindall, Captains Ashton and Hill-Trevor, Messrs. Martin, F. Cradock, Seabrook, Simpkin, Morris, and two or three others, were members—joined in to race down over the first fences of the course—the colours of the butcher-in-blue going prominently in the van. At Berry Gorse the pack had closed up; and the riders had their numbers slightly augmented—the road along the valley from Dalby giving an excellent chance to any who had caught an echo of the departing chase. Thus it may have been here, or shortly afterwards—or even before, for the scribe can only particularise under correction, and according to his light—that Mr. Wade joined in the fray; while the Master, Col. Gosling, Mr. Pennington, Mr. Parker, and Mr. Alston were early in reaching the hounds. A plough team at work outside Berry Gorse drove the fox through the covert; but the line was carried on at once at the top. The quickest part of the run was during the past ten minutes and the ten ensuing—though very few fences were jumped and gates made the way easy for galloping. A brook—the pseudo-Whissendine—presented itself in the next valley; but its banks were ragged and broken, its waters ran yellow, and probably cold; and the road and its bridge lay less than five hundred yards away. Common sense therefore declared for the bridge—though

on the stubblefield beyond the water the run fox was plain to be seen, his lengthy form moving in a direction almost opposite to that of the bridge. So Commonsense kept itself dry; and was rewarded by meeting hounds again, as the latter bent right back into the road half a mile further on. The prettiest bit of houndwork of the day now took place, as the pack carried a faint line quickly along the muddy road towards the village of Whissendine. For quite the next half mile they could not speak to a scent; hound after hound lifted her nose and followed doubtingly on, but a few old line hunters never slackened speed; and when every one but the huntsman must have lost confidence, the pack broke out of the lane at a tangent, and pursued its way in full chorus.

Thus they ran just to the right of Whissendine village —many other hurrying horsemen joining in; and the hounds warming afresh to their work when fairly among the grass fields beyond. Here the fences came quick and close, and jumping enthusiasts (a heading which on occasion may no doubt claim to include us all) at length had their fling—and, as Artemus Ward might have put it, they flung. It is not apropos of this particular period—though it is certainly apropos of the day, and wholly unprompted by the smart of any personal injury —I remark there are two essential points in riding to hounds in this country, that strangers making their first, or a casual, essay in it are too apt to disregard, or with which they have at least failed to make themselves conversant. The one is—*taking your turn* at a fence; the

other, holding a gate open till the next comer can catch it. Of course the chances are they come out of countries where the fences are to be jumped anywhere, and where the gates are never the sole means of exit for a large body of horsemen. But they would do well (if I may be forgiven for putting it so plainly) to realise that where,

"HOLDING GATE OPEN FOR NEXT COMER."

as in the Midlands, a single gap is the only place at which a fence can be jumped, and where gates are often the only possible outlet, the immense fields which they come to swell cannot possibly get quickly and fairly over a country, unless each individual will take only his own turn, and is ready to pass on the assistance that he expects from his predecessor. Of course there are sinners in our very midst; but they must be endowed

with a cuticle of inordinate thickness if they have hunted long in the country without their sense of right and wrong being touched on this head.

But of the hunt, which had now been going steadily on for about an hour, and had all but reached Mr. Westley-Richards' Spinnies above Ashwell. As hounds dwelt for a moment under the feet of hard-jumpers, a shrill view holloa came up from the valley. "Fred's holloa," exclaimed the executive—and when a second whip throws his voice it means, of course, the run fox (or instant execution). Sure enough, the run fox (already pronounced by a villager to be "done to nothing") had struggled down the hillside before another section of the rearguard, and had crossed the railway opposite the village of Teigh. The eager field made a momentary check by smothering the fox's line as they trooped under the railway—but, in a very few minutes more, hounds were mouthing and mumbling in a ditch beside a farmhouse—and a right good sporting run had ended as it should. An hour and twenty-five minutes was the average computation: and the distance from point to point (Gartree Hill to Teigh) is close upon seven miles. The scent, a curious rather than a burning one, was nevertheless sufficiently good for hounds to run fast and unassisted. At no time did it seem to carry them broadly across a field—as would a breast-high scent which each hound can reach; yet the pace was fully that of a fast hunting-run.

It was well on in the afternoon before Thorpe Trussels was drawn; and quite dark when hounds

wended their way homewards after a sharp little scurry (some sixteen minutes over the grass) to Burrough Hill House.

Who shall say that honour was not duly paid to the memory of Guy Fawkes on this Quorn Monday?

The above is but a prosy record of scanty fact. It conveys no real picture of the pleasures of our opening day, brings to mind or eye none of the glow of friendships again set going, still less does it bring out the light of the least selfish, the most hearty, of all pastimes —the jotting up at the finish of which involves no such reckoning as your best friend's money won—nor even such invidious inquiry and soliloquy as "How many birds have you down? I've (to myself) at any rate a total you can't beat." "I was making a score while you mooded over a duck's egg," etc. etc. Competition, no doubt, does exist in riding to hounds as in every other line of life. But the best result is, "I was in it, old fellow, and so were you. May we ride many another gallop together." And (if I read the lesson right, from the example and instance of better men) he comes best out of the competition who competes but with himself, and battles only against his own shortcoming.

The final rehearsal before the curtain rose to full costume and panoply was enacted by the Quorn company on Friday, November 2nd, at Round Hill by Syston, and within very attainable distance of Leicester—as was proved by the presence of hundreds to whom foxhunting may be said, without slight or calumny to them, to be a

species of art in the distant abstract, or familiarised only through the medium of Caldecott and stray scribblers (who shall be nameless) in the sporting papers. But extremes will meet—and here was an instance of the industry of democratic Leicester drawing to itself the frivolity of rural and patrician sport. Hosiery has long been the staple trade of the city. Here it had committed itself to the freak of eliminating the aspirate, and established a large osiery within easy hail of its portals. To supply the manufactory with material, many acres of wet ground had been utilised as a withy bed; and had at once been seized upon by the family of Reynard as doubtless laid out for their especial comfort and advantage. Thus there have been foxes among the willows throughout the summer; and though the neighbourhood is one scarcely calculated to show the sport in its freest form, hunting them was little less than a matter of necessity—besides offering an opportunity of paying a well-earned compliment to city and citizens. The river Soar flows just below the willowbed; the village of Thurmaston (almost a corporate part of Leicester) hems it in on one side; Syston and its junction completely seal it up on the other; while houses and gardens nearly complete the square—and every chance crevice was now carefully stopped by the enthusiastic bystanders. But has there not ere this been a well-advertised Fox Hunt in Alexandra Park, attracting and delighting all the north of London? Gate money ventures are now quite the fashion of the day; and Leicester has not been behind its fellows in appreciating the advantages of such enter-

prise. It has recently started a prosperous and well-paled race and steeplechase course; its bycicle meetings attract many hundreds into a walled enclosure; and even its volunteers in camp are only visible to the vulgar eye by payment. So far so good. But nothing seems more natural than that out of the enormous popularity of Friday's experiment a company should forthwith be formed—to inclose the withy bed and its surrounding fields and fences, and so bring foxhunting with all its more exciting attributes within easy reach of the good burgesses who have no time to waste on the drudgery of distant and unreliable sport. For this purpose of course the promoters of the scheme meditate a pack and establishment of their own on a lavish and fitting scale, and with all the appurtenances of hunting in a wild country. There should be no difficulty, by the way, in procuring the hounds; for on the last occasion on which I did myself the honour of visiting the pandemonium of Mr. W—, the well-known London hound-dealer, I found an extensive draft of hounds from one of our leading packs in the Shires (and individually not altogether unknown to me) just about to join a circus, in which they were to take a leading part in demonstrating the bright delights of foxhunting! The management of the undertaking now in prospect at Leicester urge on its behalf that there shall be no plough, no blind fences and no blank days, that topbars and topbinders shall drop to the touch, and that competitors shall not be restricted as to the number of hounds they may kill; that each gentleman appearing in scarlet shall receive a handsome premium, and that no

subscriptions to Hunt, Poultry or Covert funds, or any similar vexatious exactions, shall be for a moment entertained; while any servant receiving a fee shall be summarily dismissed. Who shall say that these are not sterling advantages—and that the promotion of such an undertaking does not recommend itself to all who would see the love of sport diffused, and its conditions popularised? To-day the entire spectacle was provided, a whole audience present and gratified, and a bevy of actors played their parts; but no grist came to any mill, no handsome proceeds fell into the pockets of enterprising promoters. Still, much was done to prove what might be effected in this direction—and the spectacle was as successful as it was suggestive. A fox was handsomely found; was hunted for more than an hour *coram omnibus;* and was duly killed, for the edification of the hundreds—without transgressing for a moment beyond the boundaries of the chosen arena. That the performance should have been thus duly retained within bounds was on this occasion of course only a matter of happy fortune—but it shows what might be done here by judicious and competent management.

Having catered thus for popular requirements, the Master took his hounds on to Scraptoft; whence they showed their followers a thorough hunting run of an hour. Though a ring, it was over beautiful country; and ended at a drain near Barkby Holt.

CHAPTER V.

MEN AND MANNERS.

THE best of Friday, November 9th, with the Quorn was after luncheon time (whenever that light but reviving repast may be held to have had its place); and in chase of a fox who had already been run for forty minutes. The forenoon had been marked merely by such facts as John O'Gaunt owning only one fox, and that fox being haplessly chopped, by Cold Newton being colder than ever, by a Friday field assuming with delighted enthusiasm all its old turbulence, by the Master having a most difficult and anything but enviable time of it at the Coplow in consequence, and by the perversity of fate which put a shortrunning cub under the noses of hounds instead of one of the straightgoing rovers which also set forth from this famous stronghold.

So the order was issued for Hungerton Foxholes; a fox left this in view; and after about three-quarters of an hour spent in circling very cheerily over some of the best of the Beeby and Hungerton neighbourhood, he was pronounced to have gone to ground under a hovel.

But while Reynard was being sought with spade and

pick, he was quietly hatching his plan of escape. The drain he had entered was to all appearance a wet and uncomfortable refuge—from which, "poor thing," it was only a matter of charity to rescue him, at any cost to himself. Somehow he found a dry corner, and, still better, marked another bolthole at the back of the hovel. This done he composed himself for a quarter of an hour to get his wind and choose his opportunity—then slipped quietly out, and stole stealthily away, evading all eyes but a pair trained to keep watch at the sternest of all schools (the sea). But for this keen look-out to windward, the huntsman and his *employés* might have quarried to the end of the claim, and,—as has been known to happen in similar instances — have met with a blank yield. As it happened, the miners were quickly roused, and the hounds as quickly laid on—at the spot where Reynard's somewhat draggled brush had disappeared through a hedge of stupendous growth and thickness. Mr. Otho Paget bored vigorously into the thorns—and, after being retained half way for a much longer period than most good people dwell over their grace at dinner, wriggled out piecemeal on the other side. Two others accepted the blessing and returned thanks as they too scraped through the blinding thicket—the rest cruised down in search of some opening more suited to their own fair faces and new November outfit. But as well gaze up at a wall of a prison-yard as seek mercy at the hands of a ten-year-old hedge left uncut on the best land in Keyham parish. The gallants who had laughed so gaily at the thorny plunge of young temerity now found them-

selves penned up in confusion and shame. Not all. For youth and blood were again forthcoming to serve them—and found its chance where any ordinary jury of hard riders would have promptly declared that none was possible. A tree had been cut away; and according to the custom which creates all the timbered embrasures in the fences of the country, its place had been taken by three stout rails. Lapse of time had brought the boughs of the bullfinch almost together overhead—added to which, there was a wide ditch on the nearside, and the approach was discouragingly uphill. A "*certainty!*" was the united if unuttered verdict. But a "certainty" is attached to the leadership of a forlorn hope—and many a man has come out of even that venture unscathed. The two forms of hazardous venture are dissimilar only in degree—the lesser to the great. But the same spirit prompts, the same material makes up, the man who, not in ignorance or inexperience but in jovial recklessness, is ready, as he would term it, to "have a shy"—while you and I curl up and look askance, as if we saw neither the opportunity nor each other. Well, the sturdy brown horse jumped as high as he could, and as far as he could; the top rail broke under his girths—his head held him up for a while, his shoulders helped him to rise again, and he carried his bold master safely on—leaving the place almost as unattractive as before. Praised be Allah! Another of the same family was still at hand—somewhat chagrined, perhaps, that the pride of place had been so rudely taken from him by his big brother. But that no want of manners should be imputed to him, or to the

THE STURDY BROWN HORSE JUMPED AS HIGH AS HE COULD, AND AS FAR AS HE COULD.

family name, he left nothing whatever to stand in the way of all who might wish to follow. Such kindly self-sacrifice, however, deserved better fate than that he should have to pursue his charger for two long fields before the latter would consent to be returned to him.

Meanwhile the fugitive from beneath the hovel was making the most of his new lease of life. Threading hedgerows and plantations by the brookside, he gained yard after yard upon his clamouring pursuers, and at the village of Beeby found himself quite capable of once more flinging down the glove on the open. He should have been stiff and crippled with fatigue and wet. But his heart seemed to grow stouter, and his limbs work freer, with danger realised and love of life fully roused. In a word, he ran straighter, and hounds pressed him far harder now than when he was first forced to run. From the village of Beeby he led them for a final twenty minutes as bright and brisk as—well, the beer of the Beeby brewery just passed. Over the hillside for Scraptoft were pretty grass fields, with some twenty men racing over them in the blinding sunlight—hounds glancing in sight only now and then like flying-fish in air. The very acme of a Leicestershire burst is—it always seems to me—when hounds go a little quicker than you can—yet when there is free space for every man and every horse to be doing his best, irrespective of others right and left or even in front. We don't see this every day. Either scent or country is generally lacking. But it is very delightful when it comes—and then, and then only, does a good hunter seem to be really at his best.

A sweet valley runs up to Keyham—the grass as rank and the ditches as grossly overgrown as if the meadows had not been stocked (as I believe they had not) for a year past—and all hands scurried on as if a silver cup awaited the foremost. Gladly would we have seen one, filled with any cool compound, ere we had dipped under Keyham village, and mounted the hill beyond. Horses were blowing freely and hounds were a full field ahead—Crash, clatter—what has happened? A dark horse down in the middle of a field, and a man surely gone to ground, somewhere. No, there's part of him at least has done being rolled over—a round cheerful face, quite pleased with the situation, and leisurely bringing the rest of the remains out after it. Of good hard stuff must that man be made, I warrant me—and none the less that he rode so forward in no scarlet robe, nor, I daresay, nourishes his nerve and muscle on vintage '74 (the milk, they tell me, of the Melton dairy of to-day).

But how the Quorn lady pack gave other passing proof of its quality by tracking its beaten quarry down a road and at length chasing him to ground in a rabbit hole, was pretty enough in itself, but gives little more to tell. Thus it need merely be added, for the information of the many whose gauge of a run is its "point," that all the work and incident of the pursuit in question resulted in its ending at the very place from which it had started—Hungerton Foxholes, to wit.

On Monday morning last, November 12th, we first perceived that winter was upon us. A dense cold fog pervaded the valleys; hoar frost had crystallised the

hedges, had laid a thick silvery crust on the still green leaves, and now proceeded to play the same trick on our weatherworn locks as we wended a hard and slippery way to covert. The Quorn meet was at Wartnaby; and here, as soon as the higher and usually colder ground was reached, blue sky was overhead, and a bright sun bade circulation and spirits reassert themselves. There is no pleasing novelty in frozen fingers; and a foxhunter's toes are his most assailable members. The misery that intense cold calls forth in his extremities is apt to suffuse and stagnate his whole being—rendering neither his company nor his appearance a medium of joy to others. Some of us are of course more easily made cold, as some of us are more readily made cross—or have already been made uglier—than others. It may be possible to combat these tendencies, especially the last——. But this is a subject we need not open here: one section of these disagreeables, the cold, is tolerably certain to pursue *us*, with what degree of pertinacity remains to be seen, during the coming winter.

Monday's was altogether a hill morning, on the heights of Holwell Mouth and Wartnaby. Hounds had to work as best they could, amid ironworks and waggonways more in keeping with Durham than Leicestershire—and if the scene had any fascination of its own it was to be found, not in a very meagre pursuit, not in the gangs of yellow fustianed workmen or their screaming clattering ballast train, but in the merry sunshine and the beauty-laden carriages that formed a show so rare and dazzling.

So much for the morning. The afternoon began in

little better fashion; but, under the influence of sturdy perseverance and a warming sun, improved steadily till quite a nice hunting run was evolved.

The frost never quite left the ground; and, while a fox contented himself with running the hedgerows and the northern slopes of Old Dalby and neighbourhood, hounds could just work out his twisting career with a certain amount of assistance. Moreover, he persisted in choosing his way as much as possible over cold and "enterprise-less" plough that seemed to laugh to scorn the zest and ambition of a very ride-loving field. Thus, it was only after he had travelled back by Saxelby Spinney, that he was forced to shape his route over grass; and then, by easy stages, they hunted him to Welby Fishpond—forcing him out towards Kettleby Village. To shorten a long and uneventful story—a nice twenty minutes at good hunting pace took them back some three or four miles by Saxelby Spinney and Grimston Gorse to, and beyond, the outskirts of Dalby Wood—after which they hunted on for another mile or so through Lord Aylesford's Covert, losing their fox at the end of about an hour and forty minutes' hard and often uphill work. The run back had to be ridden in a sunny mist, which made hounds indistinguishable a field away—though their music might have been heard a mile in the still frosty air. Fences could not be judged at fifty yards distance; and men were apparently content to follow each other in a string, the length and dilatoriness of which amply testified to the increasing strength of our daily parade. It is no longer like October—when you might wait and

crane as long as you liked, and make up all the lost ground again by as many minutes' hard galloping. Already—at least in such a strip of ground as that beneath Wartnaby, with its many gullies and old thorn tree hedges—it is quite enough to get behind once, to ensure your maintaining a position in the rearguard for the rest of the journey.

The later arrivals at Melton, by the way, since Kirby Gate, are Capt. Smith, Mr. J. Behrens, Mr. Gerald Paget, Mr. Q. D. Hume, and Mr. G. Lambton.

The frost of Monday repeated itself on Tuesday, and established itself on Wednesday to a degree that, though it did not quite prohibit hunting, put both Coles Lodge with the Cottesmore and Waltham with the Belvoir in a far colder and less attractive light than either the merits of the fixtures or the time of year deserve.

On Wednesday indeed the farmers could "cart mangold" without their waggon wheels making any impression on the soil—hardly the consistency we wish Mother Earth to have attained when our turn comes for submitting our feeble frames to her kindly embrace.

One small paragraph I may be allowed to interpolate—not to record a matter of history, but as a humble plea in the interest of us all. Gratuitously maybe, and certainly with no authority beyond that of a sense of pressing necessity, I would implore fellow-sportsmen who hunt in the Shires—where the evil is more pronounced because many times multiplied—to pay more, ten times more, attention to the farmers' property than they have ever been accustomed, or taught, to do; and *especially*

to spare seeds and wheat. The latter it is easy enough to see and generally to avoid, even with advantage to ourselves. But *seeds*—which one cannot but be glad to think are now growing on many hundreds of acres in the form of young grass for permanent pasture—these are much less readily discerned, and are apt to be treated with a lamentable want of consideration. Not every hunting-man was bred in a neighbourhood of open fields, or brought up in daily contact with the healthy technicalities of agriculture. But to whatever sphere he may have been born, he owes it to himself, he owes it equally to his comrades, and he owes it a hundredfold more to the men over whose ground he rides—to stoop to the acquirement of at least the power of distinguishing between the crops he can damage and the land that will take no harm. Every articled pupil in the craft of fox-hunting should at all events be competent to recognise at a glance wheat, "seeds," and "winter beans"—and having acquired this rudimentary knowledge ought to be prepared to put it in force by avoiding them on every possible occasion. A man may by chance jump into a field of either kind unawares; but, finding himself there, can at least ride the furrow or cling to the hedgeside, besides (in all unselfishness) deterring others from following his unlucky example. Wheat is, perhaps, less easily harmed than the other two crops, and many good authorities will even argue that it is altogether impervious to injury from this cause. But farmers at any rate are all more or less susceptible on the point of its being needlessly ridden over—if only on the score of its

appearance for weeks afterwards. And it certainly does not behove us to weigh the pros and cons of the case for them, or balance our convenience against their established opinion concerning their own property. As to young clover and other grasses, and still more sprouting beans, they cannot be too carefully shunned; and not only is it a paramount duty on the part of all hunting-men personally to fight shy of them, but it is indeed a matter of urgent necessity, as well as of self-interest, that they should insist that their second horsemen (by nature the most reckless, by habit the most careless, of the followers of the chase) also take heed of where they ride. The latter class might well (as the master of the Quorn recently pointed out) assist to minimise damage and annoyance, instead of adding to either. And by care of the farmers' interests they will very greatly serve those of their own employers.

CHAPTER VI.

BAGGRAVE.

I MUST be allowed to go back beyond the storm-beaten experiences of the past few days for the main subject of my weekly theme. Till the rain clouds disperse, till the driving wind stays its hand, and weather and barometer return to steadier courses, we dare scarcely hope for a renewal of sport. Already the ground is wetter than it usually is in January; every furrow is a small canal, every hollow is a pool; and brooks and rivers have been constantly over their banks. At present the wet slush has little holding power, and horses move through it easily enough. But as the ground sucks the water in, and the turf, as it soon will, becomes like peat over a bog, we shall speedily hear the old cry of "The *deepest* season on record."

Friday, November 16th, with the Quorn.—The very name of Baggrave Hall on the fixture-cards could not but suggest vivid memories of the late General Burnaby. How much more then did thought recur in this direction as hounds once more clustered in front of the grey building, whence for years past the kindliest and most hospitable of men was wont to offer greeting and cordial

welcome. In General Burnaby the Quorn hunt lost one of its most zealous supporters—hundreds of us lost a staunch unselfish friend. If a kindness could be done, he was the one to seize the chance of doing it. If a neighbour, or even an acquaintance, could be served, General Burnaby's time, interest, and talent were at his disposal; and trouble, however prolonged, at however great a cost of convenience to himself, was no more grudged than if the service in question had been merely a grateful filling up of idle moments. One of the busiest men in England, whether as soldier, politician, landlord, or country gentleman, General Burnaby was in all capacities and at all times quite as fully occupied in forwarding the aims and interests of others, as even in pushing on the various and comprehensive schemes that he made his own. Most of the latter, indeed, were works directly designed to benefit others—witness, for instance, the Annual Military Tournament (in aid of the Cambridge Soldiers' Orphans' Asylum) which under his originating talent and management has achieved such a vast position. His capable mind and busy genius gave him an easy mastery over every subject he undertook, and over all who might be called upon to work with him. In the same way, every man who came across him in the ordinary course of country life found in him a courteous considerate comrade and friend—and now esteems his death a grievous personal loss. Of the various stirring runs that we have in recent years witnessed from the Prince of Wales Gorse (the first sod of which was turned by our gracious and sport-loving Prince on the occasion

of the monster meet at Baggrave, March, 1871) it has been my happy lot to witness and recount several The gorse itself was nipped by frost when the icy hand of death was already placing its grasp round the heart of him who had planted it. The rest of the little covert remains in the shape of the original spinney—and we revisited it to-day with something of a chill at our hearts.

But many of you to whose lot it has fallen to attend a soldier's funeral know well the military custom by which, as soon as the volleys are fired, and a handful or two of earth have rattled on the coffin lid of a comrade, the mourners fall in, the ranks reform, the band—that but a few minutes before was wailing forth the most touching of all sad melodies, the Dead March in "Saul"—at once strikes merrily up to a lively march—heads are raised—and we all step gaily out, laying aside the recent sorrow, and ready again to make the most of all that is bright in life.

So though there was many a sad thought and many a mournful mention of the dead as the scene of the Quorn Hunt Picture was reproduced on Friday, men's hearts rose eagerly and joyously as ever, directly the scream of the whipper-in caught their ears and they were called upon to ride once more on the track of a fox from the Baggrave covert. A right good fox too; and one that suffered nothing by comparison with his predecessors. On the contrary, he initiated the occupancy of the new resident with singular felicity—bidding us learn that a successor is aptly and worthily carrying out the dearest wishes of him whom we have lost. (The covert, by the

way, is to be replanted; and the Prince of Wales "Gorse" will in future exist in the form of less perishable blackthorn).

Yes, a brace of foxes were found in the Spinney—one fell into hounds' mouths at once, the other had to bend his flight whither he could, and make his point afterwards as opportunity might offer. So, as he broke away towards Barkby Holt, we were released from our station at the opposite corner, to labour round over rough ridge-and-furrow—wondering the while whether we should ever see hounds again, whether if we did our horses would have any wind left in them, whether labour was very cheap in the days when the tillers of the soil thus distorted the face of the earth, whether we had not chosen the wrong way round, with a dozen other relevant and irrelevant speculations. For ridge-and-furrow that is deep enough to reduce each stride of a horse to a limited unit, like a note of a piano as compared to that of fiddle or flute, inflicts on the rider a prolonged period of thought and anxiety that is positively distressing. Fast horses and slow horses, short backs and long backs, good shoulders and bad—all seemed to make about equal speed over the chopping sea—and now we had circled the covert to find hounds driving up the wind a field away. For a few minutes they beat even the men who cut their way to them as they bent—and this, though neither bullfinch, rail, nor high-built fence was shirked in favour of the ready gates. Your humble servant happened, by what chance matters not, to be brought up alongside one of these fences as the rush came on,

affording such an opportunity of observing the mimic battle as is seldom given to a sharer in the fray. One would have thought that the sternest scene of warfare was being enacted, so determined and desperate did most of the combatants seem, as two and three abreast they charged home—with hats tightly pressed down, brows darkening, teeth hard set, and eyeballs starting out of their heads. They had not a smile among them! To

"DETERMINED AND DESPERATE."

do or die, was the single written expression, even on features seldom seen otherwise than moving in merriment. The veteran, the beginner, the pilot, the follower—all alike looked serious, glum and defiant. They were raking down-hill at a rasping fence; habit and experience not only bade them concentrate all their energies, but whispered that a failure might involve unwelcome consequences—and in the preoccupation of the moment they deemed themselves alone and unobserved. Mark the

change the moment the rapids were shot, the rocks left behind. A seraphic smile in almost every instance softened the stern and rigid features. Once they found themselves in smooth water, tight-drawn lips and wrinkled brows relaxed, light came into their eyes—and ere a dozen strokes had been accomplished men were themselves again, genial, warm and careless beings.

Suddenly there was a pause; the hunted fox was found to have been headed right back to the place of starting; and, with faces already flushed and hot, the field clustered once more at Baggrave Spinney. Away again five minutes later, over the grass fields behind the Hall, and so to the osier bed beyond. To gallop through this, and cross its brook by a bridge, was one safe route. To shoot what is known as Carr Bridge involved a few hundred yards *détour;* but gave the next mile (all uphill as it was to either division) on tolerable turf instead of on soppy plough. *Medio tutissimus ibis* applied well enough to the huntsman's course; for he brought both hindlegs after him with only a scramble; while the three next comers, who would gladly have availed themselves of the lead, remained spurring and vociferating on the bank, till after all they had to pocket their pride and dash off to follow the others over the little bridge. There was a capital scent, or hounds could not have crossed those cold wet ploughs so rapidly (for even on the best scenting days of this autumn the arable has scarcely ever carried a serviceable scent). At the high road on the brow (Queniboro' to Tilton) the parties reunited, and the pack, for a moment, divided. But almost immediately

hounds and horsemen were all set going again, in full swing down the grass lands of the Twyford parish—and this was the best of the burst. A goodly many—prominent among whom Mr. and Mrs. Cecil Chaplin, Mr. Brocklehurst, Mr. Pennington, Capt. Smith, Lord Manners, M. Deschamps, Capt. Boyce, Capt. Ashton, with the Master and others (not omitting a farmer, Mr. Gilson, on a slashing young one), were helping to make history repeat itself—rode fast in the track of hounds, as the latter struck the Ashby and Twyford brook at the only point at which it is fordable. Into the adjoining road some high, but easily broken, palisades offered a better chance of keeping near the racing pack than a tempting gate on the left. The next field had its ox-rail well hidden on the farther side; but an oxer down hill is not necessarily very awesome—albeit the deep galloping was beginning to tell, and the rail went off like a big gun as the hero of a hundred fights came heavily on it. There is no more curious feature in foxhunting than the constant faculty evinced by the fox of taking his followers a practicable line even over the most difficult country. Again the chase struck a bridge—the only opening for a mile, by which riders could possibly have crossed a deep unjumpable bottom. And only two fields further, hounds turned at right angles alongside—and so avoided—a double oxer that no horse in Leicestershire could have covered.

Thus a merry half hour brought us to Ashby Pastures—the strong covert of Thorpe Trussels having been left just to the right. In a quarter of an hour more, luncheon

and congratulations were being interchanged, by the side of a drain close to Cream Gorse; and about ten minutes later—as the huntsman was about to throw hounds into the gorse in search of a fresh fox—the run one bolted of his own accord. A stout-hearted hardy fellow, the latter went bravely forward; but this time preferred the colder plough to the grass that had been made so warm for him. So, slowly and with little incident—if we except the wide string of catastrophes that decked a broad watercourse on the way—he was once more run to ground (about a mile from Melton), and there left.

Saturday, the 17th, was, as you remember, a gruesome day; and if fate took you out either with the Belvoir or the Quorn, you found little to reward you for facing the snow and rain.

Monday, the 19th, with the last-named pack at Ratcliffe-on-the-Wreake, was again stormy and scentless. Very little could in consequence be done with the young foxes at Walton Thorns; though late in the day a weakly one was easily killed from Lord Aylesford's Covert, leaving unfortunately his bloodstain in Grimston Gorse.

Tuesday, the 20th, was sharp, cold, and rough, but by all accounts more favourable to scent. The Quorn (who would seem to have come in for *all* the sport so far) had an excellent forty minutes from a little corner of their country (beyond Leicester) into that of Sir Bache Cunard. They found at Narborough Bog (though how a fox could have found a dry kennel in that morass after the recent floods would be puzzling indeed, but that foxes are so

often known to harbour on little islets of ground which they have to swim to reach); and they ran an excellent line to Peatling.

Wednesday, the 21st, was, in point of weather, comfort, and sport, a more than fairly representative day of the current week. Rain and tempest followed us to covert, and persecuted us at intervals throughout the day—culminating in the fierce anomaly of a November thunderstorm, which cleared the air at once for a bout of hot sunshine. With such wild contrarieties of weather, how could there be sport? And accordingly there was none—or very little. The ride, or drive, from Melton to Croxton Park is habitually one of the coldest experiences of the week. To-day it possessed the additional attraction of being one of the wettest. Five miles further to draw a covert—"and yet we were not happy." But discontent had no place when covert-coats could be stripped off in such cheery company as ever constitutes the field with the Duke of Rutland's hounds, and when that beautiful pack is busy in covert, bidding us be ready to Go. But I have no excuse for dwelling over Wednesday. The Coston Covert fox clung closely to the immediate neighbourhood of his home, till he could get back to the main earth. This, however, is excellently arranged, so that—as we have seen on a dozen occasions—a terrier can always be brought into play. And this time we got as far as Buckminster, under all difficulties. The entire field had spent a considerable period during the run tightly packed in some hovels—while thunder growled overhead and rain came down like a waterspout.

One section of them discovered, after leading as many horses under shelter as their hovel would accommodate, that they had overlooked the presence of a bull in an obscure corner. The bull was a young and very peaceably disposed beast; and kept his temper admirably till a horse backed on to him—when he set to work with a will to cut his way out. The horses got frightened; so did the men. The former began to kick, the latter to choke on their half-swallowed luncheon—and, in brief, there was the devil to pay. The noise was alarming; while the bull stuck steadily to his task, and at length issued in triumph from under the girths of one of the best-looking hunters from Grantham. Beyond the shock to the nervous system of the company generally, and a few sounding kicks that kept time to the prods administered by the bull in his passage out, I believe no ill results ensued; though I doubt if any of the party will care to be included in similar society again.

An afternoon fox from Buckminster was afterwards followed smartly over the heath country for three or four miles—leaving the Melton division to wend a weary way homeward nearly from Stoke Rochfort.

CHAPTER VII.

BARKBY GORSE TO TILTON.

MR. BROMLEY DAVENPORT, your vivid lines once stood me in good stead—when you set every hunting-man in England aglow with your prophetic idyll of "A gallop from Ranksboro' Gorse," and in the following week my feeble pen was exercised in telling how the augury had been fulfilled, the allegory reduced to fact, in the great Ranksboro' Run of January 13th, 1877. There must surely be something in the coincidence that now again I had been revelling overnight in the power and thrill of your picture of Foxhunting (painted a few months ago in the

Nineteenth Century); and the very next day brought forth living illustration, in fit sequel to your stirring flight of fancy. May your spirit be with me while I strive to sketch the incidents of this last great gallop that you have seemed to prompt. Other men say they have seen no such run for three years. Certainly I, in my humble capacity of recorder, have assisted at nothing like it in seasons lately past.

The morning of Friday, November 23rd, was bright, sharp, and sunny. Rime frost still lingered by the roadside, while the road itself still remained in what might be termed rattling condition for the many carriages that rolled into Rearsby Village—the halfway house twixt Leicester and Melton—the meet of Quorn, and the place of gathering of all who could ride or drive from either town and from the country between. The busy merchant, the smart Meltonian, the thriving tradesman, the struggling farmer, the county magnate, the soldier on leave, with many another of lofty and lowly grade, mingled to form the largest meet of the early season. Brougham, victoria, buggy, ponytrap and taxcart—not excepting many samples of that wondrous Leicester conveyance wherein one couple look straight to their front, while immediately behind them another look straight in each other's face, as if equally ready to fight, flirt, or play cribbage—all brought their burden of beauty or their contribution to the chase. But, apart from the social aspect and variety of the scene, enhanced, as it was, by the quiet loveliness of the morning and the picturesque attributes of Mr. Woodcock's pretty resi-

dence amid the elm trees, there was something in the air that spoke of sterling vigorous sport. Why else should one and all of us—knowing little, if anything, of the mystery of scent, and daily learning only that we know less—have exclaimed "There'll be a run to-day?" The spirit of instinct chimed in with the fostering wish—and the outcome was more than we had dared to hope.

The day began with a pleasant five-and-twenty minutes' ring from Gaddesby Spinney, performed in the closely fenced area of Barsby parish, and ended by the fox getting to ground at Queniborough Spinney, close to which he was found. In this little hunt alone we had jumped enough fences to constitute a day's work for a horse in many countries; but it was early yet for second horses, and many a man forbore to change—who would gladly have had that first freshness under him when, a little while hence, the struggle came. Casualties both to horse and man occurred, even in this short pursuit. They are never pleasant subjects for record. But the accident by which Lord Lanesborough lost a valuable horse was as curious as it was untoward. While galloping down a turnip-field (one of perhaps three pieces of plough crossed during the day), and looking over the hedge at the hounds running beyond, he rode chest-on against the handle of a horse-hoe, which pierced his horse to the heart—the shock sending the rider on to his face on the ground. The horse stood for one moment over his master, deluging him with blood; then, rearing straight on end, fell dead beside him.

Barkby Gorse, a square covert of some half-dozen

acres, immediately adjoins the well-known Barkby Holt, a green and muddy lane alone separating the two. The slightest possible breeze was blowing from the west; and the Master marshalled his field on the windward side. Not until every rider had taken his place, were hounds thrown into covert; thus the good fox at home was well on his legs before the time of trial came, and then he was free to travel whither he would upon the wind. The first cheer starts him off; the first scream sets the lively ladies of Quorndon romping on his foot-prints. Two ant-hilly grass fields give them room to settle and time to close up—while, as thickly packed as antelope on the veldt, the herd of horsemen bound over the low rail fencing and pick their way hurriedly, or gallop right recklessly, over the knotted turf. Now the pent throng squeezes through a gate, to cross the one acre of fallow that they will see for many a mile; now they dribble one by one through a low gap that we recognize only too fearfully and well. A deep little ditch is set under the grass at the exact distance to catch a free jumping horse—and often as we have had to cross it in hurrying away from Barkby Holt, we have never known the tiny but too effectual trap to be without its victims. The Master and Mr. Gerald Paget are claimed for its own to-day—and a fall in such a gallop would seem to be fatal to loss of place more certainly even than in a National Hunt Steeplechase!* For

* Readers will remember that in the Grand National Hunt Steeplechase (1883) in the neighbourhood of Melton, with twenty-three starters, even the winner fell once, and refused once.

several fields the good chestnut that should be carrying one of them is to be viewed rising gallantly at each fence in turn—but, his fore-leg being through the bridle rein, turning a terrible summersault over each.

We had seen this morning (it is but 12.50 yet) that hounds could run even before the hoar frost was off—but

"TURNING A TERRIBLE SUMMERSAULT OVER EACH."

we were scarcely prepared for a scent so ravishing as now. Foot-people are holloaing lustily over the brow towards Baggrave. Hounds want their help no more than they regard their distraction; but, swinging towards the sound, dash through a flock of sheep as if coursing their fox by sight. The silly sheep run after them to the fence, and block the way till the pack has earned a field to the good. Mr. Hugo Campbell crashes through the timber the moment they give him opening; while Count Kinsky makes his first appearance in public in his well-known character of pioneer, almost simultaneously on the right.

Mr. Hames dives sturdily through the next bullfinch; and so, by friendly offices, the way is made plain and easy—and all we want at present are legs to go faster. The pack, meanwhile, might be going upon wings. Yonder is Baggrave Spinney, and yonder are hounds just disappearing into it—while, a full furlong behind, the foremost riders are looking twice at a strong post-and-rail. Second thoughts, however, follow rapidly on second looks—and it is anything but a terrible place after all. The huntsman cuts at once through the middle ride of the little covert; several men strain round the lower side; but those on the upper have a straighter course and a better view. "Are they through?" "Not yet—but they very soon *will be*, if this fox is worth his salt." (*Worth his salt, indeed!* He will put your strength to the test, ere he has done with you, gallant gentlemen.) There they go—see those white streaks flashing under the far hedge. Half the pack only—for a fresh fox before their noses has turned the other half from the line. The horn, with its unmistakeable *forrard-away*, catches up many of these stragglers—but, strive as they will, theirs will yet be a long stern chase. Already the leading couples are half across the park, ere even the readiest gallopers have slipped on from the covert, and cut the corner-fence opposite the Hall. Again are foot-people shouting; and again is Reynard turned a hundred yards (the utmost he will diverge through his five-mile course). "Left! Left!! or the park wire will hold you!" This is a moment when 'tis useful to know the country—though more often such knowledge is a snare, a source of shirking, and a fruitful

cause of needless terror. Through the heavy gate and over the rough and broken pasture—the already slender band of riders are bearing uphill towards the little pack, the latter beating horses yard by yard. A clean oxer, a scratchy bullfinch where the ox-rail lies broken, or a single flight of timber—there are three courses open to you, some fifty yards apart. The Count seizes the first, Capt. Smith, Mr. A. Brocklehurst, and M. Deschamps the last; while three or four others squeeze under the tree, and recover their dangling hats as best they may. A steep sudden dip in the ground, with a grass-covered rivulet running below—a horse half blown, with an indifferent mouth and a pronounced aversion to anything flapping about him—these scarcely make up the time and circumstance that we would willingly select for the pastime of fishing for chimney-pots. (Oh, who will join a society—it must be influential and numerous—for donning caps, for doffing swallowtails in favour of lengthy flaps, and for relegating breeches tapes to—the provinces?)

Now again the going, though deep and tiring, is smooth and fair. The great grass fields are some forty acres apiece; the ridge-and-furrow for a wonder lies all the right way; each valley has an easy fence, each gentle rise discloses hounds just gliding over the next—or gives the rear guard a similar glance at those riding in the van. Gallop as you can, and squeeze as you will, you may keep pace with the tail hounds that left Baggrave with or behind you; but not an inch will you or they gain on those racing couples in front. There is little to tell of these two miles after Baggrave covert—as far as

distant ken and immediate aftertalk warrant my story—beyond that galloping, ceaseless, grinding, galloping, formed the essence and criterion. On the broad hillside between Lowesby and Quenby hounds flash momentarily beyond a smeuse—one old lady (Dahlia, I am told), alone striking through, to cross a deep boggy bottom which a dastard memory, rising only to the call of cowardice, recognizes readily. It might have come right in the stride, and been left to us as a mere harmless trifle by those who went before—led, as we should have been, by the ex-Carabineer just appearing over the low stile adjacent, and by the huntsman now rolling over the same. What do we find? Twenty men huddled in a corner—forty more flocking thither. A plantation on the left, a cross fence on the right—new timber in front, where once was an open chasm, of itself quite equal to putting us down in years gone by—as more than one can sorrowfully vouch. Ten yards of low plashed hedge completes the corner; the gulf is of unknown breadth, of well-known depth; the opposite bank rises precipitately; the huntsman's cheer has thrown hounds forward after the yellow bitch—and we don't like the prospect at all! But the last week or so has brought back a man whose office in life—after the well-being of his master and the well-doing of the latter's young horses—would seem to lie in assisting us all, in difficulties and out of difficulties. So once again Downs is to the front. The chestnut four-year-old accepts the task right willingly; jumps as far as he can; and, now on his knees, now on his nose, finally on his legs, recovers everything but his

wind—which, or as much of it as prudence will allow, is found to be exhausted after another half mile. The rector of Stonesby, scarcely needing this encouragement, drops his chestnut in turn into the pit, and he too scrambles up the bank without a fall. The huntsman's bay mare does equally well for herself and rider; but also does quite her share in churning up the quagmire. Capt. Smith is down; M. Deschamps is not; Mr. Pennington falls; Mr. Brocklehurst keeps his legs, and so does Capt. Ashton. One after another now they come rolling over—each casualty conducing to the next—the crowd fuming and fretting almost in silence (we are gentle in our savagery in Leicestershire)—and hounds are fleeting far away. To avoid the choking breach, Mr. Fred. Gosling turns over the side fence; and, overgrown and untempting as the gully seems in its upward course, he finds it after all much easier than where the crowd is hindering itself. The same result attends the efforts of other searchers lower down. But all this, direct and indirect, unavoidable and part of a chapter of accidents, is taking time—time that cannot be regained, till all the object of recovering it is gone—time that, as distinct from hurry, constitutes the economy, indeed the basis of riding a gallop to hounds. Meanwhile there are now thirteen couple a full half mile ahead—speeding onward like the brief moments that have to counterbalance and quicken the many dull days of existence. *Forrard*, you beauties! Life is happiness while we can hang on your skirts o'er the merry green grass. "Open the gate, sir, if you can; or take the young

one's neck off it, and turn him round to the wind!" 'Tis seldom we ride this beautiful line, by the side of the Lowesby brook, where the fences are old and half decayed, and the turf so sound. "Hilly and wet," we may term it, under the test of a twenty minutes' race, and a start that we cannot keep. As a matter of fact, the ground is excellent riding—but hounds have no weight to carry—and, reader, your tailor will tell you (in language more delicate and acceptable, no doubt) that you do not girth as you did in 1873. Your groom (who has always a turn for humour, if allowed to indulge in anything so disrespectful) might term it "girthing *better*" —but you deem it otherwise, and your opinion is likely to be stoutly confirmed if, with fourteen stone and a bittock, you are now contending with hounds to reach Lowesby Station. The latter is one of the many blots now disfiguring a land that erst flowed only with the milk and honey—the cream and spice—of foxhunting. It has established itself in the once sacred vicinity of John o' Gaunt—an outpost of the Mahdi of progress as typified in the G.N.R. Hounds dash across its very precincts, bringing up the huntsman and his little following short in their tracks. Mr. Brocklehurst, M. Deschamps, Capt. Ashton, Mr. Cochrane, jun., Rev. Seabrooke and Lord Manners—not a large proportion of that big "Friday field." The station-master joins keenly in the sport, and waves his gold-laced headpiece with frantic zeal, to point the fox's line and the way over, with the most confusing impartiality. At length the leaders realize that their only means of passing across the railway lies

a full field back, where a "cattle crossing" runs under the embankment. Thither they hurry at the best speed their panting horses can raise—to find the white railway gate already besieged by another little force, intent upon raising it from its hinges. "One more man!" roars the colonel, as he and his confederates nearly break their backs in futile effort. Six more men furnish effectual reinforcement; and the whole struggle up the Tilton hill—to find the pack hovering on the summit, above Large's Spinney. Five miles they have come, as straight as hounds or the crow could fly—the time half an hour, to a minute or so either way. Hitherto it has been a point-to-point steeplechase. Now hounds must hunt round Tilton Village, nearly to Tilton Wood, and up the wooded peak of Colborough Hill. The navvies are at work about Tilton Station close at hand, and already are shouting in wild chorus. But navvies always yell when they see a red coat—so this may only be their playful way of welcoming us. They have cried Fox so often, that now we may well be chary of belief. But this time the fox is really among them—actually running down the platform and along the metals, with his tongue out, his back up, and his brush dragging low. Half a dozen hounds bring his line down to the station—but, alas, alas! the others are away in the opposite direction, running hard on a fresh fox.

Thus, though the huntsman at length comes back from the borders of Owston Wood, and, in the vain endeavour to pick up his beaten fox, works up to Robin-a-Tiptoe, the end of this great good run is not to be

signalised with blood. A seven-mile point is no every-day occurrence here, whatever it may be in other, perhaps more fortunate, shires—and this gallop had a dozen happier qualities than its point. I have only to add—what most of us will deem a welcome equivalent to a kill—that our gallant fox lay exhausted on the Tilton railway, till the platelayers caught and put him unharmed into a bag. He was then conveyed back to Baggrave, where under the tender care of Mr. Muggleton, he shortly recovered not only strength but appetite—and is now again at large, to give us another such gallop.

CHAPTER VIII.

HILL AND DALE.

FIFTY-FIVE minutes—a good old orthodox time—*and* a kill in the open. This was the run—or, rather, the second run—of the Quorn on Monday, December 3rd. A brilliant gallop and an excellent hunt, it presented by no means unbroken sameness throughout—as I will endeavour to explain as we go.

The woodcutters had been at work in Thrussington Wolds—a forty-acre wood, and perhaps the best natural covert of the Quorn north of the Wreake. Thus a find seemed unlikely from the first; and by the time Firr had worked his way nearly to the far end of the deep inner ride, thought and speculation were forward with the next probable draw—or turning to the man with the belt, who ought to be at hand and probably wasn't.

Almost at our very feet among the fallen fir trees there was a sudden unmistakeable challenge; another and another. Here he comes! Hush! for heaven's sake, or he'll be chopped! The lathy brown form is making its way right up to the group of horsemen at the cottage corner. Hounds are all round him as he hesitates and

raises his white mask inquiringly. By Jove, he's a bold one! A dash for the hedge, and he is away down the wind—defying alike the fifty pair of eyes of which he has to run the gauntlet, and the eighteen couple of noisy ladies making merry over his departure. Dark, cold, and drizzly is the day—a keen contrast to the weather that has served us up such sport in the past fortnight. The high-level country, too, above Ragdale is a cold wet soil, that in farming parlance will "scarcely carry a goose to the acre." But still, and again, there is a rattling scent; and—what is nine points of the essential law of a run—hounds are away on the back of their fox.

Everybody who would could get a start to-day; and with this advantage—in addition to that of a line in itself not too difficult, and rendered still more easy by the propinquity of a parallel road into which men could drop at almost any minute—almost everyone might see part or whole of the run in question. Many of us, even most of us (our conscience may bid us confess) rode to men rather than to hounds during part of those first flying sixteen minutes across the flat to Dalby Wood; others were probably baffled and hindered by the ironstone-waggon way on the Dalby hillside; and many more were certainly blown and beat after climbing the heights of Little Belvoir and pulling out our timepieces to settle eight-and-twenty minutes as the reckoning to the first slight check. Yes, we were all near enough to keep the watch at work to-day; and, as we had one and all failed to take the time in the great run of Friday week, each of us remembered to mark it to a second to-day.

But I have wandered away from hounds at that most critical, most crucial of all moments—the start. The bustling ladies are getting together over the wet rough meadow that bounds the covert; and men are rapidly trooping forth from the wood—mentally girding up their loins and bracing their sinews for the coming tussle. That they all pull back in their tracks as hounds swing suddenly across their very faces directly the earliest fence is jumped, is, I venture to think, as much a credit to their own perception of the necessities of the moment as a tribute to discipline and daily habit. Had the fall of their squadron leader been the signal for an immediate halt, they could not have reined in shorter. The white horse is caught and the rider remounted ere the forward movement is, almost instantly, renewed. A horrid fall it looked, as the two heads ploughed the field together—that of the weaker mortal undermost. But he was 'listed when men were held to be men, even at forty—and when twenty years' service was believed to season good leather, not to wear it out. So the crumpler makes little difference, save as a wholesome lesson to the grey—who will take care not to repeat the offence of fancying himself still in Northshire, where rails will break easily and hedges are to be brushed haphazard. Over short chopping ridges and wet sedgey furrows we are fairly set going. Who knows how long it may last? Who knows but we are merely hurrying over one rough field that we may have to pull up in the next? Who is such a fool as to be left behind? Who will not make the most of what the gods give him—and take his fate, or punish-

ment to-morrow? Hounds are beyond all reach of mischief, shooting out of sight through the high black hedges. The deep sticky ground will keep us—you on your thoroughbred, me on my lumbering Pegasus—well removed from mischief till the steel is out of us both, and out of that dusky brush besides. You ride honestly in their wake. I plunge at the corner, for the light green turf that shimmers through the bullfinch and that I know will carry old Hairyheels far better than the clay you skim so lightly. Yo-oi! We pull up together at the lane above Ragdale; the lissome pack darts through a tiny spinney; and we drive onwards over the most unsaintly pasture in Leicestershire, where the ridge-and-furrow would seem to have been built for a chessboard, with anthills thrown on it as pieces. Not a hole in the black bullfinch in front—so we must pull to the right—in luck or cunning avoiding the plough—dash down its cart track with due gratitude for the mud-favours showered from the front, and make up what ground we can over more wet grass beyond. Shoby Scoles has loomed and been left to the right. Our fox means something better than a point so near. Onward, across the wind they carry it. Men at work, boys at play—even this desolate region would seem to be alive to-day. One and all of them have seen the fox—and the fox cared not the whisk of his brush for any of them. A farmer that we could ill afford to spare to the Atherstone (Mr. J. Cart) is wetting his spurs and refreshing his memory in his home country. Now the hunt, at its best and quickest, is being led by another of the true yeoman sort—who could ride to

hounds when most of us had not even attained to a rocking horse. Turning sharp and readily as hounds themselves—spotting every gap, yet shrinking not a moment from accepting Mr. Lubbock's lead at a palisaded oxer—Mr. Simpkin rides as jauntily as any of the young and dainty school behind him. Again, ten years are not far to look back upon: and we can well remember the Quorn cutting across this very ground—in a twenty minutes' afternoon burst from Ellars Gorse to Lord Aylesford's—which Mr. Lubbock then reached *facile princeps* in his chase of hounds. To-day—so say those in a position to tell—he is riding in quite the same good form, with Mr. G. Lambton as his nearest assistant. (And in this early scurry over blind ditches, strong fences, and varied grass and plough—with such a scent that hounds bore themselves well out of over-riding distance—the chronicler may fairly seize upon name and prowess that admit of no gainsaying.)

So sixteen minutes have brought us to Old Dalby Wood—and on such terms with our fox that these rough hillsides (the wall of the Vale of Belvoir) are, for once, less likely to help him than his pursuers. The pack cuts through the wood without dwelling a moment; and now we must dive into the vale to circumvent the ironworks and thread the waggon-ways which have brought so unsightly a change upon the edge of the Vale. Were not hounds running so fast, and we not heartily warmed to work, we should little relish scrambling down, and again up, the precipitous hillside, clattering for half a mile along a tramway, and then plunging full speed down a

steep stony road. But all the while hounds are speeding alongside and below us, enjoying the turf which we cannot reach, till under the gorse-covered slope of Wartnaby Stonepits we can join them—only to be called upon again to chest the bursting ascent. The best of backs and lungs can scarcely cope with it, and retain strength enough for the new cut fence and wide dug ditch on the summit. A long, galloping bay succeeds in propelling his lengthy forehand to terra firma; but the striding hindquarters that work so well on the flat are here a mere incumbrance. However, the roll is in the right direction—and the fence is beautifully less for the panting animals that follow. Now we hurry along the brow, and round the plantation, to find hounds with their heads up near the well-known edifice of Little Belvoir. Two foxes have just been seen by the ploughmen. One has turned back into the spinney, the other gone forward towards Holwell Mouth. Nine times out of ten a well-run fox is forward; and ninety-nine times out of a hundred he is down the wind. Some more casuals in the lane aver they have headed the fox. But hounds still declare him forward—and Firr wants no further evidence. What is that dark speck skimming the stubble down in the vale? What else is it likely to be but our fox? Hounds run hard to the spot, to endorse the view; and now again would information, of another fox, have gladly robbed the huntsman of his quarry. Hounds are determined to press on; informant is equally determined that the fox has turned up the hill for Holwell Mouth. Both are doubtless right—but we had ever better trust nose

than eyes if we would stick to a run fox. Now we seem to be bearing upward to Clawson Thorns; but it is a good omen that we turn suddenly down the vale again as we meet a waggon at the Clawson road. Reynard cannot be far ahead, or why should the waggon have mattered to him? Hounds are driving with their hackles up; but a fresh ploughed fallow by Long Clawson Village gives them, for the second and last time, a moment of puzzle and search. A hat is up at the corner of the field; hounds are lifted this once; and in the next great pasture they are racing the big brown fox up the hedgeside—rumble-and-worry forming a thrilling bass to the shrill sharp treble of a who-hoop that might be heard at Melton.

A Monday field with the Quorn is always of pleasant dimension—as it is of very pleasant material—enough people for sociability and enough to ride a run. Yet there is none of the crowd belonging to a Friday south of the Wreake—nor are the elements of the field so varied, comprehensive, and heterogeneous. Men seem to be better known to each other and to hail more from one district; while the farmers, in greater force, always take advantage of a Monday when they can. The following names represent a strong proportion of last Monday's meet; and most of these might equally be incorporated with the finish of the day: Mr. Coupland and Miss Webster, Colonel Forester, Captain and Miss Starkey, Mrs. Parker, Miss Paget, General Chippindall, Colonel Gosling, Captains Ashton, Barclay, Boyce, Grimston, Henry, King, Langlands, Messrs. Cochrane (2),

J. Cradock, Hume, Gerald Paget, W. Paget, Deschamps, O. Paget, Martin (3), H. T. Barclay, G. Pochin, B. Lubbock, Parker, Beaumont, W. Chaplin, E. Chaplin, Knowles, G. Lambton, Wade, Simpkin (2), Cart, Knight, Hames, Marshall, Henton.

The morning episode from Ellar's Gorse the same day only just missed brilliancy through our fox gaining a start of some minutes as he stole away over the brook below the covert. Even then—gauged as a hunting run—there was little to cavil at in the hour's work that led us, with multiplied opportunity for jump and gallop, to the honey-combed banks of Shoby Scoles—where this two-season hunter is in the habit of making good his escape, whether he has to wend his way by a Willoughby-and-Dalby Circle or by means of Six Hills-and-Thrussington Wolds. To-day he laughed at us through the former medium.

Friday, the last day of November, wound up an extremely good month for the Quorn in very consistent fashion. I fancy that everyone who went to Great Dalby must have had his fill of sport and riding before the close of the day. Or, if he failed to do so, it was due to some untoward accident or shortcoming of his own—surely to no fault in the fare offered him. For hounds were running hard most of the day—choosing such lines and circles of country as admitted of everyone obtaining his share in the fun. Had the two runs been much straighter and faster, it is certain that some two hundred people could not have gone home content. The first ring—from Gartree Hill—took close upon an hour

to complete—the earlier half being voted excellent, for it embraced the strong pastures of Great Dalby, and included the best part of the Burrough steeplechase course, at a capital pace. It is a matter of conjecture where we may have changed foxes; but there is room for belief that, for a second time this autumn, hounds never recovered the true line after touching the garden of Burrough Hill House. In the afternoon a fox from Thorpe Trussels, headed in the village, all but died a craven death in the poultry-pen of Thorpe Satchville Hall. But, escaping from this, he repeated to a letter the evening burst of last Kirby Gate day—then, reaching Burrough Hill, bore to the left by Great Dalby, and was prettily run and hunted almost to his death, at his own door. "Gentlemen! gentlemen! *Can't* you stand still while hounds hunt up to you?"

Not altogether devoid of comedy, by the way, was a little scene encountered just previously. The two hundred were hurrying, breathless and excited—some to keep with hounds, others to catch them, and others still to catch others—and, so doing, they closely enveloped and overspread a fallow field, in the immediate vicinity of the Hon. Mr. Sandford's hunting-box. To-morrow was to be Piper Hole with the Belvoir; and if there is one man among us who studies and insists upon *condition*, it is Mr. S., for whom, moreover—in virtue of various pleasant memories—an evening run with the Belvoir ever possesses an especial charm. So Alderman, by Forager, dam by Repletion, being a bit heavier than he ought, must without fail do a light gallop in heavy

clothing—"mind, a steady pace only; but not to be pulled up till he has finished his two miles." The task happened to be only just begun when the pack broke noisily into the field. Boy turned one eye and one ear in the direction of the sound, and merely took tighter hold of the head of Alderman, who himself paid very little more attention to the interruption. Completing his

"BOY NEVER TURNED HIS HEAD, ALTERED HIS PACE, NOR MOVED A MUSCLE."

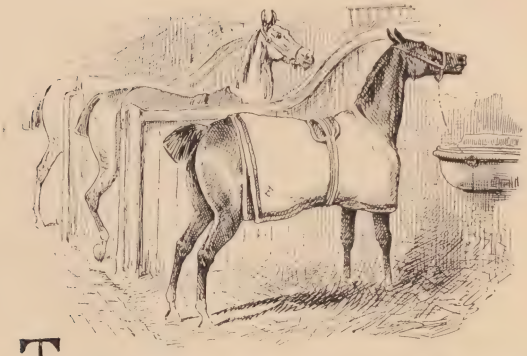
circle, Boy found that he was now doing his gallop in company with a dozen men in scarlet. This mattered to him not a jot. He neither mended nor slackened his speed, but went with them to the end of the field; then, wheeling as he found an opening, performed another circle, and accompanied a second detachment up the fallow. By this time the field was full; but Boy never turned his head, altered his pace, nor moved a muscle. He merely counted his circles and steered his way

cleverly through the throng of horsemen—from among whom one would now and then turn off after him for a few strides, like a puppy leaving the pack after a hare—only to rejoin his comrades under the impression that he had seen something uncanny, and that so many late nights in succession would really never do. Every rider of the whole company passed; but Boy still went doggedly on, driving his sheeted and hooded conveyance round to complete his allotted cycle, and treating the stray crowd with as much unconcern as if only a flock of starlings were fussing past. Not out of mere curiosity, but in some slender hope of being enabled to inculcate even a little of this rigid respect for duty and orders into the members of my own ill-regulated establishment, I would gladly learn what influence was at work to render that Boy so entirely callous to all outer surroundings. Are the stirrup-leathers at Merton Lodge, think you, kept supple by the same use as that to which Mr. Isaac was accustomed to put them in Market Harboro'? Does a bit of rope's end still survive to keep up old associations with blue water? Or again, did the Boy's master happen to be the first man to jump into that fallow-field—transfixing him at once with a quarter-deck eye that there was no mistaking? May we look to any of these, or was some deeper seated agency at work to produce an adherence to duty that we had hitherto believed to exist only under the direct superintendence of the drill sergeant or the boatswain's mate? I seem to see that rigid imperturbable horseman still; but for the life of me I cannot (with a certain experience of the genus) bring

myself to imbue him with a rigidity of rectitude that should thus out of sheer conscientiousness enable him to pursue his way so totally unmoved—surely the most marvellous living instance of *justum et tenacem propositi virum*.

CHAPTER IX.

A TWO DAYS' BREAK.



THE frost of the week ending December 8th rudely interrupted a routine just established—a day-to-day life thoroughly entered upon—a habit of being and doing to which body and mind had become fairly set. The disruption, for which we might well have been prepared and were not, put the machinery of existence all out of joint—giving us a shock as if we had never thought or heard of frost, and as if the four months' future had been bought on the conditions of open weather and uninter-

rupted sport. The stoppage came too soon; we had not bargained for it, we wanted none of it—nor did our horses. Thus we grumbled at home, or took our growlings abroad; at once made up our little minds for the worst; accepted a hard winter as a foregone conclusion—and there was a long list of absentees, shooting, playgoing, and in various fashion picking oakum for Satan, when, after three days, the wind chopped round to the south, proclaiming a hunting morning to inaugurate the new week.

The Quorn accordingly reopened the ball with another long run on Monday, Dec. 10—covering a great deal of ground in two hours. The pace never approached that of some of their recent more brilliant performances; but they ran over a very goodly country, and showed much beautiful hunting to a field of such a size as could best enjoy it. We cannot expect to be galloping full speed every day—nor, if such were possible, would it suit either the luck or capacity of each and all of us. Every dog has his day—and some dogs are satisfied with less of a day than others. We are jolly dogs if we have turned the spit of fortune so as to catch the full blaze of success in a hard-ridden chase. We are doleful dogs if we have been left in the shade; our tails go down; we whine and lament; we even insult the understanding of our fellow-men (excellent judges and unsparing, even if silent, critics) by explaining with much emphasis the unheard-of combination of circumstances that led to our missing the run—and perhaps we miss another the very next day. But the catastrophe should not befall us in what we

term a "hunting run." We surely ought to be there then—if only to assert our right, as subscribers, land occupiers, or poachers, to ride among the hounds and round the huntsman. So we all of us make the most of a hunting run; see more of the work than we can possibly expect to in three "gallops" out of four, or in ninety-nine out of a hundred (according to our calibre, mental, bodily, and generally effective); have a great deal more to say about it afterwards (not the worst part of foxhunting); and probably go to bed without any of the soreness that may be our share after the fastest "run of the season."

Monday's was an excellent example of such opportunity. How much we may have seized it—why we did or why we didn't—is best known to ourselves, and to the man who, never very forward himself, invariably has an inquiry of mock solicitude for you and me as we jog up with apparent unconcern after the fox has been broken up. On Monday hounds brought us a long way, for the most part over a very eligible country; the fox made an honest point of eight miles and a half; and whatever else might happen on the way, it could scarcely have been the pace that choked the straggler off.

My brief and very unvarnished narrative has to start from Willoughby Gorse—where we found, no doubt, *the* Ellar's Gorse fox of repeated renown. The first seven or eight minutes' rush led us through a cruel country—very nice grass, it is true, but that grass parcelled out in little plots and paddocks so stiffly fenced that no two comfortable gaps lay opposite each other; and the boldest and

most venturesome of our stock pilots were to be seen dodging and twisting like hares turned by greyhounds. Ellar's Gorse is but a mile from that of Willoughby; and when once we had passed the former, had left the brook satisfactorily to our right, and reached the road on the opposite hill, we deemed the gallop assured, and a pleasant easy country ahead. But carriages and foot-people broke the first dash; scent lay dubiously on the yet cold ground; and slow hunting began. I am far from saying that true, patient, and—as in this case—quick hunting has not charms, or even charms in their own way quite equivalent to the more effervescent delights of a sharp scurry. On the other hand, I would never dare argue that Leicestershire, and a Leicestershire field, form at all times the best scene and surroundings for the quieter phases of line-hunting. Indeed, when men's blood has once been roused by the hurry-scurry of a flying start, I should say they form for a while the very worst. But a very few minutes will serve to cool needless ardour, and bring the hottest of enthusiasts to his bearings. To ride to hounds here (quite as much as anywhere else) men must have learned to keep an eye on their movements; and to see when it is no longer necessary to rush and rake. Once let hounds settle and men be quiet, it is certainly more enjoyable, and probably no less edifying, to see a fox steadily hunted over a good country than a bad one.

The fox in question succeeded in crossing the road at last, leaving the pack to puzzle out his line down a side lane, before—field for field, and fence for fence as on

two previous occasions—he carried them on above Old Dalby to Lord Aylesford's Covert. A plough team turning him in the last field, he skirted Old Dalby Wood, and rested awhile in Grimston Gorse—moving on again in view as hounds came up. From Saxelby Spinney, just beyond, ensued another sharp ten minutes over the best of the Quorn Monday grass. They ran slower again while the field worked its way out of the entanglements of the three bottoms that cut up the ground below Wartnaby; but set to work quicker again round the tightly-fenced neighbourhood of Kettleby Village. From the Belvoir covert of Old Hills their fox gave some of the field another view; but a slight check ensued at Scalford Spinney, half a mile further. Just short of the railway beneath Melton Spinney hounds bore to the left for Scalford Village; and—having now scored a point of eight miles-and-a-half from the find—settled down as if running for blood. A mile of deep plough came as a distressing variety to horses that had been steadily pegging on for an hour and a half. But above Clawson Thorns, Reynard was signalled as close in front; and at the neutral covert of Holwell Mouth he found the main earth an open refuge. Verdict—a real good fox, and a right sporting run. Recommended by the jury—that, as the earth stopper has now so fully established the neutrality of the covert by allowing a fox to get to ground in the earth in front of both the Belvoir and the Quorn hounds within the last month, he be now instructed to smoke out and close the said earth permanently until it is again needed in the spring.

CHAPTER X.

BARKBY TO TILTON AGAIN.

SURELY no one who started in that black storm, from Thorpe Trussels with the Quorn on Friday (Dec. 14), could have dared suppose that a day of sport was before him—however deep his faith in the pack, and however assured by recent events of the bright ascendancy of its star. Rain and tempest nearly swept one from the saddle, blinded men and horses, confused the pack, and washed away all trace of Reynard directly the railway was crossed. (I fear me, by the way, that the good man who so deftly unlocked the gates had his outstretched hat more readily filled with rainwater than silver in the dark confusion—for the most grateful and ready of pockets could scarcely have dared open to the drenching downpour. It was a relief, however, to see that the acute janitor was sensible enough to reappear with the sun, to claim from several the gratitude, and the *pourboire*, which should ensure us favours to come. The little luxury of "a glass to Foxhunting" at the village public is—believe me—a wondrously valuable agent in these precarious times. Its recognition is not a costly affair; the opportunity is frequent enough; and hunting

men who would combat the hostile influences, day by day more manifest against their liberty of action and recreation, may well afford thus to nurture the name of Fox-hunting among a class that were born to honour and esteem it, but are now too freely schooled to revere nothing.)

This parenthesis gives us time to find the passing storm overpast, a fresh fox found in Ashby Pastures, three couple of hounds on with him to Thorpe Trussels, and the huntsman galloping the others up to join them. By and bye we were away up the yet wild wind, with the green slopes of Twyford and Ashby Folville in front. In the teeth of the breeze there was a brilliant scent—a scent that proved itself marvellous in every field. For, eccentric as are the ways of the wily one, I at least have never known him tack and beat up the wind so sharply as now. In fact, he cut and drove against it like a snipe—the pack spreading a hundred yards broad, and dashing into each twist with a swing that kept every hound at top speed. There was nothing in his path to turn him; nor was there any apparent reason for his passing over a fluted drain that had seemed his obvious point. Possibly, finding himself pushed up the strong breeze, with a wide-spread field behind him, he had no alternative but to persevere. In this case the result was a very bright twenty minutes' scurry, with a scent that, on a day so wild and rough, we should scarcely have found down the wind. He skirted the village of Ashby Folville, then at last kept his head straight, and took us gaily to Mr. Cheney's Long Spinney at Gaddesby—across

a pleasant and roomy line of grass below the village of Barsby. The fences were strong and the falls were many—but the soft ground makes falling, if not actually acceptable, at least ten per cent. less disagreeable than under harder conditions (the unfortunate accident to Mr. S. Paget in a gateway being a sad exception, on which, as is our custom and principle, we forbear to dwell).

A touching action, not without its moral of goodwill and friendship, came to light while some fifty people were clearing the last fence approaching the spinney. Among the earliest to fly the stake-and-bound was one of Melton's smartest sons—his flushed and heated brow now bared to the cooling breeze, and his fair locks as nearly flowing as the weekly visit to the London barber would warrant (for we are very punctilious on this head—at all events till we reach the sober age of thirty, or till we find ourselves added to the list of Benedicts). Immediately following him rode a gallant gentleman who came last winter, not only to learn how English fox-hunting was carried on, but even to bear away to France "the laurels and the siller" of the Leicestershire Hunt Steeplechase. Adapting himself with extraordinary readiness to the ways and fashions of the sport, and rapidly acquiring the knack of riding to hounds—he yet found one little detail to puzzle and trouble him far more than merely learning how to fall, much more than accustoming himself to stout timber or scratchy bull-finches. This to him lay in the incompatibility of the hat of society to the rude exercise of the chase. A tall beaver would surely be as much out of place in the

glades of the Forest of Versailles, as a long winding horn round Tom Firr's body would be here. The exceptional good breeding of his race renders every one of his countrymen nimble and graceful beyond all others in the art of doffing the hat. But the point now so difficult of acquirement was *to keep it on*. Well-fitting hats—hats too big—hats too little—all seemed possessed with the same cruel objection to remaining in their proper position. When he jumped, they flew. When he fell, they broke away. He took his falls with the *nonchalance* pertaining to a courage that would not be daunted and a resolution that never failed. If the hat and he chanced to fall on the same side of the fence, they rejoined forces, and went on in the fray together. But he was far too good and determined a sportsman to throw away a run for the sake of saving a hat. *Vestigia nulla retrorsum* was his motto—which, for information of a certain hunt servant who was for the moment so sorely hurt by my thoughtless and opprobrious epithet of *locum tenens*,* may be translated as signifying "Look back for another hat"—and so he sailed onwards in the first flight of many a good gallop, hatless, brave, and unabashed. In fact, the possession or not of his hat by M. Elysées began to be regarded as more or less the criterion of the merits, and especially of the pace, of a run. It was even suggested that a scale should be established, and the standard of the gallop denoted by

* Within a week of the chance employment, and the subsequent funny misconstruction of the term, Mr. Punch was supplied from the Vale of Belvoir with material for a cut conveying the mistake in another form.

the temporary head-covering worn by him on the way home—for instance, a yellow bandana to betoken a rattling half-hour, a white kerchief a sharp twenty minutes. But look at him now, in the second month of his second season, as he lands over the fence by Gaddesby Spinney—after a scurry that has levelled and dishevelled many a pretty horseman! Is he bare-headed? Is he

"PRODUCED IT WITH A SWEEP TO HIS VERY STIRRUP."

still a victim to an infirmity that brought him a bushel of chaff, and cost a hatful of money? No, doubly No. His own faultless headpiece, with its smooth silk almost unruffled, sits lightly and firmly in its place—while in his teeth is tightly grasped the hat of his brother-Meltonian, who having left it in the first thick bullfinch from Thorpe Trussels, had thought never to see it again. The friend-in-need, with both hands free to steer his way in the race, had never relinquished the legacy that he

found in his path—and now produced it with a sweep to his very stirrup. Does not a fellow-feeling make us wondrous kind?

But the run of the day, of course, was in the afternoon—from Barkby Holt, and with the same good fox as on our famous Friday fresh in memory. As my prophetic soul bade me foretell, he gave us another gallop on the same lines—and he did his part bravely. Again we ran to Tilton; again we rode the Lowesby pastures; and again he beat us at the finish. On this occasion we galloped most of the five miles—last time we raced the whole of them. On this Friday we crowded through bridle gate after bridle gate—but avoided the disastrous bottom to which so much misfortune was attributed a fortnight ago. So much for comparison. Now for a few small details, and I have done—for there was nothing in the run to justify a narrative of men and deeds. To begin with, no one who viewed the fox on Friday last, and had viewed him also that other day, could have believed in his identity—till, as the run proceeded, we saw him work time after time back to his exact former line, and at last succeed in running it gap for gap to Tilton Village. For the dark healthy fox was now changed (no doubt from the exhaustion of his previous effort) to a mangy and sorry beast of strangely different aspect. But he was strong enough still to stand before hounds for a hard forty minutes—and may yet carry us over that pleasant ground again. To-day he was found in the Holt; and, with people riding all round the Gorse, had to escape at the lower end before turning for

Baggrave. This necessity put the South Croxton brook (a pretty little bank-to-bank jump) in the path of all who rode to hounds—while just previously it had also included one of the surest traps in the Hunt circuit. It ought to have been well known to all who have ridden from Barkby Holt to Queniboro' Spinney. Perhaps it was to many, in the cunning of our hard-earned geography. But for all that, its second ditch (a full horse's-length away) reaped a full harvest once more. We rode through South Croxton Village, along the bridle-road to Baggrave covert and Hall, along the bridle-road to Lowesby —along the bridle-road yet further, and only the two miles past Lowesby Station to Large's Spinneys by means of legitimate cross-country work. At half-a-dozen different points there were footpeople to keep Reynard to his bridle-path course, and forbid him the range of wild grass that he had traversed so boldly and rapidly before. But, with a scent not brilliant yet more than fairly good, it was an excellent hound-run: and only the odium of needless comparison could detract from its sterling merit. On the Tilton hill, hard by the village, our fox lay down for two or three minutes; but, before the hounds (at fault on a fallow) could be brought to him, he was again on his legs, and finally baffled them in the middle of the village—forty minutes from the find.

CHAPTER XI.

SPORT IN SEASON.

COULD foxhunters have bidden a merrier Christmas than that of 1883, with its quiet mild weather, its daily companionship, its wholesome and corrective exercise, and its very antagonism to the seasonable misery of icy idleness? Day by day we have made merry and felt happy in a fashion more healthy than anything offered by the wassail bowl or the irrational and indigestible pudding. A scarlet coat is better than red berries; and the misletoe went out of date with hunting the slipper. Hunting the fox is the truest Christmas pastime—and in this we could indulge to the very eve of the feast-day, under the happy conditions of calm warm air, dry skins, and almost dry ground.

It would be impossible to conceive three pleasanter hunting days than the Thursday, Friday, and Saturday preceding Christmas—with Sir Bache Cunard, the Quorn, and the Cottesmore respectively. No great event came of any of them. But merely to be riding about was a luxury; and to know that the season was un-Christmas-like was in itself a boon.

Thursday, Dec. 20th, at Illston Grange, was a quiet muggy morning—which might mean a scent, but might not and did not. The beautiful Norton and Billesdon country never shone out more enticingly than now. The big assemblage included men from Market Harboro', Melton, and all the district between; but Fate did nothing for them. A cowardly fox got back to Norton Gorse and to ground as quick as he could—while three grim fences brought some thirteen good men also to ground. Shankton Holt had by accident stood over for six weeks—and four brace of foxes were ready to run. But scent was *nil*, either here or from Sheepshorns. Yet, to instance the perversity of scent and fortune—the Meynell showed the run of the season to two or three Meltonians who took train that day to join them.

Friday, Dec. 21st, was only relieved from poverty by a sharp brief scurry in the evening—scarcely enough to reward, certainly not enough to satisfy the appetites of, the many who had come from a distance. It would seem, by the way—not to judge from this particular day, but from every day of this delightful open winter when hounds have met in any fair sample of the country round—that not only do more men hunt, but that they travel farther and more readily to do it, than ever before. The explanation of the fact—if I am right in assuming it to be a fact—lies no doubt in the multiplicity of railways, and the new facilities so readily advanced by competing companies. During this Christmas holiday time, indeed, our fields are made up quite as largely of strangers from afar as of members of the home or neighbouring Hunts—

and this, too, quite apart from the welcome swarm of beaming schoolboys. But, merely to join the pack nearest their own, and to avoid long roadwork, the regular hunting men of the district appear to make far freer use of the trains, even of the old-established rail-

"HEY, JOHNSON! * * * ORDER ME A TRAIN! I'LL HUNT WITH SIR BACHE."

ways, than they were accustomed to before they had the example thus lavishly set—albeit an instance to the contrary suddenly jumps into memory, carrying me back fully half a dozen years to one Thursday morn. The clock had barely finished striking nine at a certain Lodge in Melton Mowbray (smoking hours having been prolonged overnight and Thursday voted an off day), when

the voice of mine host sounded loudly over the banisters, "Hey, Johnson! Bring me my shaving-water at once, and order me a train! I'll hunt with Sir Bache."

But about Friday afternoon last. The Quorn had for once been out of luck. They had brought off only a slow hunt from Scraptoft; and had then, alas, chopped the good Barkby fox in covert. In fact, the only amusement of the day had, at some considerable trouble and no little risk to themselves, been generously furnished to a circle of appreciative friends by two of the best proved riders of our younger school. Tired of inaction, they felt bound to do something to break the monotony. How better than by breaking a top-binder? But anybody can jump a hedge. Anybody, however, cannot light harmlessly on his feet at the foot of the thorns, stopping a rushing horse in a single stride! Bravissimo! Oh, but we can beat that easily. Houp-là! Over we go—the mare turns a summersault, so do we—our patent stirrups describing a parabola and dropping side by side twenty yards off. A light, you wish, sir? Certainly, our horse is down, our stirrups they have flown—and our cigarette has never left our lips!

The sole remaining chance of the day lay in the little Gaddesby Spinney, whence the first bright gallop of the season had dated. Out with the watch again! Three o'clock this time! and the self-same fox I believe and hope. Again he heads for Gaddesby; and again we troop into the road—no, not all; for the huntsman, Messrs. Beaumont, Baldock, Lambton, Gilson, and one or two others ride the line of hounds fairly, and jump

the wide cross fence directly after them. See, the pack swings towards us now, the leading hounds are not forty yards from the road—and we have done a right clever thing, thus to cling to the lane! Have we, though? 'Twas somewhere here he bent away before—and now see them turn suddenly northward again! Slip out through this first open gate; disengage at all hazards—or safely and certainly you will be carried on in the rush like a straw down a millrace. The foremost hounds are already wheeling off. The fox has been headed from the lane. Cut across the angle with Mr. and Miss Chaplin, Mr. Miles, and the few others who have extricated themselves, and you may ride in their wake over the very gaps that helped you in that November gallop—while, thundering down the lane, and finding never another exit, scores of good men are now galloping right away from hounds, in helpless bitterness of soul. To write the history of the next ten minutes would be but to repeat a tale already told. Fence and gate, field and gap, yard for yard, did hounds and horses swiftly follow their footsteps of a former occasion—leaving Gaddesby village behind them, and scouring the Brooksby farm from end to end. But here the repetition ends; a check and a change of foxes came after a quarter of an hour, and the best of the chase was over.

Saturday, December 22nd (the least difficult form is that of the skeleton diary)—the Cottesmore at Wild's Lodge, only three miles from Melton breakfast tables (involving therefore only two more cigars overnight).

"Reynard don't seem to see it. 'Take those dogs away—or I won't play!'"

At the Meet. Effect of unusually open season even on Melton studs. Rigorous and opulent sportsman is not wearing pink. "How's this, my dear fellow? Aunt gone at last?" "No (with a sad sigh). No. Fact is, I rode this horse first on Thursday; had but one other for to-day; my fellow said 'he might do a bit this morning if I *only wore a black coat.*' So I've been obliged to humour him." Take this to heart, ye who set no store on the noble "red rag" of foxhunting, and who wonder why the second horseman don't touch their hats unless you happen to be riding in company with the purple! (Farmers, parsons, hunting correspondents, and men-who-have-had-a-cropper-and-can't-go-in-their-usual-form, of course being at liberty to adapt their costume to their circumstances and condition). This little moral tale reproduced by special permission—all rights reserved.

11·45. Under the old tree on the Burton Flat—near the river side opposite Wyfordby—Reynard looking down from the main fork, some twenty feet up—Master cracking his whip below—huntsman and hounds openmouthed and hungry a short fifty yards away. Reynard don't seem to see it. "Take those dogs away—or I won't play." "Shy a stick at him—and don't get in the way of the hounds, sir!"

11·50. Cannonade fairly opened. First discharge produces obvious effect: and enemy cowers behind such shelter as he can find. Second discharge, still better directed, brings about a decided panic and an immediate change of position. No casualties at present on our

side. Third discharge completely routs the enemy. Now for pursuit, brave boys!

Reynard's five yards start, however, proved quite enough for him. From that moment until after 3·30, hounds were busy trying to catch him, or his substitutes —but went home with no nearer acquaintance with that bright red fur than when it shone before their wistful eyes from its lofty perch, or dangled a moment ere it descended almost on their noses. They hustled him up and down the precincts of river and railway, past Burbage's Covert and back into Stapleford Park—in one of the wet furrows of which he lay gasping, till half a dozen throats grew hoarse in holloaing over him, and while the pack vainly sought a clue below the House. Cooled and refreshed, he then preceded hounds into Laxton's Covert, and then perhaps climbed another tree —for it was a dark black fox that now played a long game of hide-and-seek amid the privet. "A bad fox" of course we dubbed him—one and all of us, from the line-hunting veteran of sixty to the coming Nimrods twixt six and sixteen, who are blossoming now like Christmas roses, and who wanted to be off and away. We all thought we knew something of foxes; and we all said something of this one—because our tongues must wag, and because we failed to see that a fox would not be forced in a direction contrary to his bent. For, after all, he stuck to his point and made his way—across the broad park, round its farther limits, over the railway by the level crossing, and on beyond Wymondham Roughs. We galloped the flat heartily; and then had a sharp

hard quarter of an hour—till again involved in the railway. So to Ashwell, by bridge and crossing and arch and padlocked gate—threading the line, whereon extermination threatened hounds every quarter of a mile. But these are days in which even engine drivers read of how wars are made and foxes are hunted. Train after train slackened or pulled up to give the pack time; and ours I fancy was the more dangerous progress. It certainly was when we reached the Ashwell Vale, by which time all courage had fairly cooled and men merely sauntered after hounds—letting the unravelment of sandwich-papers and the disentanglement of their fox's course divide their attention in proportions somewhat in favour of the former study. High flights, whether of intellect, enthusiasm, or high timber, are scarcely the natural outcome of minds relaxed. Yet now of a sudden they found themselves in a position that would have been scarcely welcome with temperament at boiling point. A new ironstone waggon-way, bounded on either side by lofty post-and-rails, had been built across the valley; and the Ashwell brook—diverted into a newly-dug channel—came at right angles to form a corner. A workman beckoned across the railway to point their fate; the hounds were already over—and the freshly sawn timber rose menacingly white and stiff. A dozen ready pair of arms were quickly at work to force an opening; but the oak-posts declined to move, or the ash-rails to do more than bend and spring back. At this moment Capt. Blair was to be seen riding along the low embankment. How did he get there? Must be a nice hole farther back, of

course! So the party remounted and turned along the line with gladdened hearts—to find their comrade's foot-prints marking the greensward whence he had made his jump. They couldn't stay there all day—so the fun began. Two horses refused; and a dozen at once followed suit. The second whip and his steed then rolled in without actually parting: the Master, after putting up with one refusal, took his hunter by the head, and fairly squeezed him over—in a fashion that few of our generation have strength, hands, and horsemanship to imitate (but that it would have warmed Col. Thomson's heart to witness). The huntsman's journey in was the crowning result of many efforts; but, instead of encouraging those who in breathless anxiety watched his clamber back from forehead-band to saddle, it went far to confirm their first impressions of the undesirability of the attempt; and Mr. Cecil Chaplin was his only follower. Two or three others plunged somehow along the bed of the brook, to gain the railway bank and the gate on the opposite side. The rest found there was "no hurry after all"—and, bringing united weight and discretion to bear, caught hounds an easy quarter of an hour afterwards. Then we could see them hunt on under Market Overton to Barrow Gorse, run back fairly fast to Woodwell Head, and confess themselves beaten about midway between that wood and Coston Covert—after nearly four hours' patient and often pretty hunting.

The Quorn had quite a wonderful run the same day; and though they met in a somewhat unfashionable corner of their country, they found a fox to take them almost

into the heart of it, and to pick out for them all the choicest ground by the way. Meeting at Cortlingstock, they drew Bunney Park, and thence ran a distance of *between twenty-two and twenty-four miles*, making a twelve-mile point, and crossing not a dozen ploughed fields in the whole run! I trust *The Field* may be furnished with a detailed account of this great hunt from the pen of someone who was with them. Meanwhile the following outline will convey a fair notion to those who know the country.

The hounds pressed their fox up and down Bunney Wood before he faced the open; then they ran him fast by Wysall and over a wild grass district between Hoton and Wimeswold. Leaving Prestwold to the right, they hunted on nearly to Mr. Cradock's Spinney by Six Hills; then, crossing Mr. Coupland's farm, freshened the pace again till they overlooked Old Dalby. Bearing now to the left, they kept above Upper Broughton, passed to the right of The Curate and close by The Parson's Gorse, past the left of Hickling and by Key Wood (where the Belvoir had been about three quarters of an hour before). As their fox failed, so did daylight; and, though he was constantly viewed as he crawled before them up to the village of Colston Basset, darkness came on when another ten minutes must have sufficed to kill him.

In a week that was fruitful of no great events (bar the feat of the Quorn on Saturday, when all of the Melton side were hunting elsewhere), perhaps the most to enjoy was found in the Christmas Eve gallop from Thrussington Gorse—when the Quorn raced a fox into view in twelve

minutes and hunted him to ground in about forty-five. Twice in the day it happened that a fox, just entering upon the beautiful Hoby Vale, preferred to turn in to a drain rather than trust his strength over those wide fair fields. But this by the way—and, I should have added, from Cossington Gorse and Thrussington Wolds in turn. The run was from Thrussington Gorse—hounds quietly slipping away on a fox that left unseen. He crossed the Fosse Road between the covert and Six Hills—and they were across it too, long before any Christmas crowd could cut them off. A dozen men turned out of the road (always the most difficult, yet often the most desperately necessary point in riding to hounds); but they had scurried almost out of sight before anyone had reached the second road, by Mr. Cradock's Spinney. Round this they swept like a whirlwind, pointing as it were for Ellar's Gorse — Downs in closest pursuit, with Messrs. G. Lambton, Pennington, Beaumont, and the huntsman apparently the only others who could live the pace. And indeed it was a fair trial of speed, as for those early minutes they competed over firm young turf (for many hundreds of acres on this side of the Quorn country have been redeemed to grass in the last few years), with low level fences that could be taken anywhere and in the gallop. A dozen minutes they flew towards Burton—and now their fox was plainly to be seen, toiling onward a small half-field in front. Dodging a hedgerow, he flung them off for a moment; and, when some twenty minutes in all had passed, he had joined another of his kind—the two crossing a fallow together. An instan-

taneous change of scent proclaimed a change of foxes—and, though they ran and hunted round Walton to Prestwold, the life of the chase was gone. Finally they had to give it up near Hoton New Spinney.

CHAPTER XII.

THE OLD YEAR OUT.

THE old year went out happily enough through the medium of the Quorn—who brought off a hard and excellent run, and wound up 1883 in befitting fashion. From Curate's Gorse they ran over an immense tract of good ground between the hours of twelve and four thirty—scouring, in fact, nearly the whole of their Monday country. A slice of the vale of Belvoir, as we all know, dovetails into Quorn territory between Widmerpool and Wartnaby—the prettiest grass lining the basin and continuing over the hills that rise on three sides. Crossing, re-crossing, and circling it now, hounds first spent an hour and a half within and about this charming amphitheatre—then passing over the Wartnaby heights, worked westward along the broad slope above the Valley of the Wreake, till they had nearly reached Ratcliffe: finally hunting till dark beyond Segrave and Burton. How many foxes they ran it would be impossible to say; but apparently they were never off a line from find to finish. Had they killed their fox, as seemed inevitable when after the first hour he lay down in a fallow field, the run might have taken rank with almost any of the

season. Its prolongation was strongly typical of "too much of a good thing." Men rode on with tired horses till they could do no more, and long after they could gather much pleasure from a country that grew better and stiffer at every mile. That the huntsman could work on undaunted under the dispiriting knowledge of repeated changes of fox was a credit to his courage, as it was a proof of his reliance on the endurance of his hounds.

Widmerpool New Inn had been the meet—the thought and sympathy of every Quornite being directed towards Widmerpool Hall, where Major Robertson lay a sad sufferer from the loss of an eye, destroyed by a thorn during a recent day's hunting.

Nottinghamshire (as was only right; for the rendezvous is, I see, within the bounds of the better cultivated county) was quite as strongly represented as Leicestershire; and altogether there were quite as many people "on the ride" when a fox left The Curate, as hounds could fairly be called upon to compete with. The Belvoir had been within a field of the covert the day before (in a good five-and-forty minutes from Sherbooke's Gorse); and it was great luck that a bold fox, now so ready to fly, should not have then been frightened away. Hounds started not on the best of terms; but could run well on the grass, were helped over one ploughed field, and after a couple of miles had settled into full swing. Widmerpool had been left to the right; Willoughby was the apparent point; we could go nearly as fast as the pack, but hounds were not easily to be pressed. What

could be the meaning of a horseman galloping, hat in hand, right into their faces and ours? Of course that he had "headed the fox"—a crime as heinous (however involuntary), as anything in our social calendar, comparable only to the sin of ugliness in womankind. The baser sinner in question belonged to a line of life whose

"HE'S TURNED RIGHT BACK, ALONG THE TOP RIG O' THE GREENSIT PIECE."

first burden and duty, in return for wages received and instruction imparted, is to be told home truths with a timely plainness of language that defies mistake. But this good man, unwarned by past visitations or totally lacking the astuteness that (however imperceptible to the eye of the looker-on) seldom fails to stand a second horseman, or a street arab, in good stead, but helps him out of many a difficulty—or, maybe, carried away by a worthy excitement—must needs gallop almost into his master's arms, shouting "He's turned right back, along

the top rig o' the greensit piece" (*Anglicè*, the top ridge of the greensward—for he was evidently born of the shire). Darkly as the many errors of his previous life must have been held up before him by the same tongue; black and base and unprecedented as his conduct had been pictured many times and oft (till he had come to regard a mere modicum of reproach as positive approval), I doubt if he ever truly realised his unworthiness till now—when he almost cannoned against his outraged employer. But let us draw a veil. His feelings have doubtless been blunted long ago. Ours should be somewhat callous (probably are) after that still harder taskmaster, the world, has ridden roughshod over us for an uncertain number of years. But even we are still excitable; sometimes almost enthusiastic—never more so than when we have safely issued through the turmoil and anxiety of the earlier stages of a burst to hounds, and for once have succeeded in joining that chosen band of a score—or twain at the most—who are really "seeing the run." At such times, in mind and thought—or even, it may be, in words of haste—we are apt to be just only to ourselves.

The first sharp edge of the gallop was now gone. What took its place was bright enough; but a quick game of follow-my-leader (where the country admits of more than one or two leaders to show us where we may ride in safety) is better than the scramble of a big field all going the same pace, and when any little regard for hounds on the part of an individual leads only to his being at once thrust to the rear. Matters, and pace,

mended sensibly after the Fosse Road was recrossed and as the chase swept down upon the railway by Old Dalby. Hounds then ran lustily across the Vale to the Wartnaby Hills. Along the brow they pushed cheerily—some riders sticking to the vale, a greater number clinging to the upper ground. From beneath, the pack were plainly to be seen working their way fast along the skyline, while distant halloas proclaimed that Reynard had kept to the ridge, even to Holwell Mouth. Indeed, as hounds and their followers reached that covert, a fox was to be viewed rising the opposite slope in the direction of Long Clawson; and, starting again on better terms with him, the hounds drove him hard into the vale again, to a point midway between that village and Nether Broughton. Here he lay down for some minutes in a fallow, while the huntsman cast round the field. Up he then jumped in view; and the odds were 100 to 1 on a speedy kill. But he kept ahead of them still over the green meadows round Nether Broughton, and regained the hills of Wartnaby (1 hour and 30 minutes to now). Beyond the smaller spinney of Saxelby, he puzzled the pack for a while; and it was probably a fresh fox that took them on, into and through Grimston Gorse. Thence by Ragdale, Hoby, Thrussington, up to the ploughs of Cossington and Segrave—mostly at a fair hunting pace, and until darkness came upon them at no great distance from their kennel doors.

A monster Christmas gathering was held at Brooksby Hall on Friday, December 28th. The fog of previous days had changed to a thin mist, through which the sun

sent his warmth, though he could not brighten it with his rays. The meet being an obscure secret, only to be circulated among subscribers, had been whispered abroad so lavishly that all the forms of advertisement known to Mr. Willing could not have called together a fuller concourse. As the hounds trotted off to draw Bleakmoor, the Melton road carried a mile of humanity, on horseback and on wheels—trooping in close formation from the trysting place beside the old church and Hall. A primitive people, I am led to believe, compose the population of the region round Brooksby—once a thickly inhabited district, now only a manorhouse and a garden-church, with squire and rector duly attached. Each pasture surrounding it bears curious indentations, mounds, and marks, denoting probably the site of former buildings. But not till a week or so ago has any really reliable explanation been forthcoming of their origin. The "oldest parishioner" of the adjoining village was asked for information—and promptly gave it as follows, "Well sir, they do tell me as Squire Cromwell made 'em. Kind o' fortifications like. But I can't say as I knowed him."

I have no long story to tell of Friday. A beautiful hunting day brought but little fruit. The morning fox was found among the small plantations in the neighbourhood of the meet: and all that was of passing interest in the short-run ring concentrated in the difficulty and disasters of a single impediment—which fairly "held up" a hundred people till hounds might have been two parishes away, and to all appearance were. A water-

course had been diverted into a new and clean-cut channel some ten feet broad and about as many deep. A bank remained beyond, a horse's length across, and a stout post-and-rails made up a double-fence, of a fashion with which neither we nor our horses are as yet familiar. Firr was riding a clever black that had graduated in Ireland; so made no bones of the combination. The next pair refused, the second fell in, the third fell over. Then came a complete jam. Everybody wanted to have it at the same spot, and everybody got in everybody else's way. The former bed of the stream ten yards to the rear prevented a fair run at any other point of the new channel. So there ensued at least ten minutes jostling agony, while twenty people dribbled over—then at last it was discovered that a bridge existed within a hundred yards, and relief came with the discovery that hounds were at fault by the Melton road. To conclude in a word—the day held no run at all.

Last week, by the way, was a singularly unlucky one for Sir Bache and his field. In the fog of Thursday two couple of good hounds were cut up by a train; Col. Gosling had a crushing fall over wire; Mr. Tailby staked a valuable horse, and Mr. Fernie had a similar misfortune. Truly this pleasant open winter has not been without its equivalent sum of mishaps.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE NEW YEAR IN.

A TRULY grand day's sport was that of Monday, January 7th, with the Quorn. In the morning they ran a six-mile-and-a-half point in forty-three minutes. In the afternoon they ran for an hour without any absolute check, only abandoning pursuit when, half an hour later, darkness found every horse completely tired. Both runs carried them far over the border into the Duke's territory; and both took them at a great pace over much beautiful ground. So rapid, stirring and profuse were the events of the day, that pen and head fairly stagger at the task of setting them even in skeleton shape before the public. In fancy I may still see the shifting stage, and its many actors flitting before me. But much of course I was not in a position to see, and much I failed to grasp in that turmoil of happy action. Besides (freely as by friendly indulgence I am allowed to presume), I have no licence to deal with men and their doings merely as if they were there to serve the purpose of the public and the printer's devil. I may, however, state a number of those who comprised the company; and in sketching the sport shall crave the use

of an occasional name as the prominence of its owner may compel.

At the meet at Old Dalby were Mr. Coupland, his son, and Miss Webster, Lady Wilton, Lady Cardigan, Lord Belper and Miss Strutt, Mr. and Mrs. Pennington, Major and Miss Starkey, Mr. and Miss Chaplin, Miss Livingston, the Duke of Portland, Lord Manners, Gen. Chippindale, Col. Percy, Col. Forester, Capts. Smith, Henry, O'Neal, Ashton, Hill-Trevor, Campbell, Goodchild, M. Deschamps, Messrs Brocklehurst, Beaumont, Behrens, E. Chaplin, Cheney, Cradock, Cochrane, Forester, Lubbock, C. W. and R. Martin, Miles, O. and W. Paget, Parker, Pole Carew, Pryor, Praed, Turner-Farley, Henton, Knight, Marshall, Pearson, Simpkin, Smith.

The soft west wind of the early morning had veered a trifle to the north; and had a bite about it that—added to a rising glass, wet ground, and a quiet sky—portended, nay, for once made a certainty of scent. It needed only the sight of the leading couples flying up the fallow above Grimston Gorse to show the certainty confirmed (for a first ploughed field is a sure criterion of scent in a grass country). Their fox had found himself, and crossed the railway cutting as the field was leisurely taking its place on the tunnel above. The huntsmen was for the moment pent within the covert; while, struggling and straining forth one by one, the eager hounds worked their way to the head, with the marvellous celerity that distinguishes a highly bred and level pack. The body of them were through the small square wood of Saxelby close by, and were streaming up the green hillside

beyond, ere the readiest horsemen had dipped the first valley. The bridle road to Wartnaby took hounds and men together for the first half-mile, and tempted many a rider too far along its ready path.

Ye gods, how they fly! The mottled pack, now running in a broad mass, is skimming up the second grass field in front; we are crowding through a gateway, into a rough meadow that is built for anything but rapid galloping. But spurs must go in, knees must press, and horses must be driven hard—whether those wet green furrows are as boggy as they look, whether the grass-hidden grips can catch us in the stride, or even if the effort is at the cost of wind and strength. The Duke of Portland is the only man within close hail of the pack; and is making the best of such a chance on his good bay mare (the plum of Mr Younger's recent sale). The fences are just what they should be when good turf leads up to their feet, viz., broad, strong, fair and clean. They come easy now, with the last hound flicking through each, as we skim the one before, with never a moment for the veriest coward to funk or crane. How long this may last we know not. Suffice it that we conjure nothing better for the seventh—or seventeenth heaven. There are some awkward ravines and gullies in this happy district, we know only too well—and the Wartnaby Bottom has been a terror and a hindrance to generations. Here it is, by all that's disappointing and terrifying—with its black fence frowning and its brookbanks yawning. But again do fox and hounds of themselves help us in dire extremity. We knew of no bridge or

opening for a mile—and here, as in blank despair we follow men and hounds into the lowest corner, an old hidden gate is flung open by the foremost horsemen, and we are free to hurry forward at our best. On the big pasture opposite Wartnaby Hall, a flock of sheep dash across the front of hounds; a man stands in his gig in the open road above, pointing onwards towards Cant's Thorns. The fox no doubt had eyes as ready and keen as those of the passing traveller; but the swing of the pack in their own forward cast takes in the turn without a second's loss of time: and with undiminished pace they are onward over a succession of tight little meadows at the back of Kettleby. Capt. Smith and Mr A. Brocklehurst land together into the road by the village—Firr joining them at the same instant as if from the clouds; for certainly no other man could have made up the ground within fifteen minutes of extricating himself from the gorse, fully fifty people being then between him and hounds. The little brown is almost burst by the effort; but, very shortly afterwards, Mr Coupland snatches an opportunity to change horses—setting his huntsman on the grey—while a moment's breathing time easily enables the blown one to bring the Master to the end of the run.

Another unjumpable bottom is to be crossed where bullocks have put fence and brook on the same level, and where only a hurdle answers all purposes of winter gap-mending. How thankful we are—but how *many* yards we lose when such an outlet has to be carefully forded or a gate has to be unlatched! And on a day like this we can almost measure by ear the distance of

the flying pack—so clear and sharp and regular is its rapidly fleeting music. Now we are in the Nottingham and Melton road. Where are the hounds that we hear so plainly? Yonder they flit by the railway side (the Holwell ironstone track). We have ridden the exact reverse of the line already this year with the Belvoir—and to this perhaps we owe the gallop of to-day. But what is really curious lies in the fact that we shall ride these very fences, creep these very holes, open these very gates, in a second run to-day. Let that remain. I promise myself and you to inflict no minute repetition. 'Tis all I can do to separate two runs so oddly entangled.

The next I remember in this hurried chase is half a dozen hot-faced men huddled in a corner—looking one to the other for assistance, and each looking less capable than the other of giving it. A new white oxer in front, a drop beyond—two refusals against the side fence—and "bellows-to-mend" all round. But the good sorrel warhorse, that has become almost as famed and familiar as his master, is equal to this or any other similar occasion. The white rails are shown to be no impossibility—and the next comer, bringing still further evidence, and weight, to bear, removes their self-assertion altogether.

The pack runs the waggonway for half a mile; most of us run it a mile, and join the bridleroad throng from Wartnaby, Kettleby, and Holwell. But Mr. Cochrane carries out the principle of *seniores priores* by boring a way through the overhanging bullfinch alongside—and carries out also the huntsman and a grateful following

from the trammels of the waggonway—though he bears an honourable scar on his cheek for the rest of the day, perhaps for the rest of the week. The covert-lined glen of Old Hills is at this time just to the right; and we top the hill to double two more roads, to leave Clawson Thorns wide on the left—and to gallop up to *another* ironstone railway. (It has been my fate to write of hunting for some fifteen years—and I aver, in sorrow and in truth, that the word *railway* is at the end of my pen at least fifteen times oftener now than when I was first entered to ink.) An old man fumbles willingly at the padlocked gates by his farmside: Firr rides luck-lessly down to another pair of white gates some fifty yards away, where there are not even a pair of clumsy willing hands with a key—while in anguish of soul he marks bold and bedraggled Reynard toiling up the next field, hounds a hundred yards behind him, and a flock of sheep scuttling between. Who shall say that a hunts-man's career is without its agony? To make matters worse, two quarrymen stoutly aver that they have stood for quite a quarter of an hour in the very gateway through which the fox has actually passed! Such is in-formation from the passing clod, whose eyes, startled from accustomed vacancy or the ground, have risen to the coming fray. But for the quarrymen, but for the sheep, but for the locked railway gates, that fox might have been handled within half an hour. As it is, he is able to stay above ground for five-and-forty-minutes, and to bring his brush safely to the main earths in Goadby Gorse—his point and goal throughout. This little check

is the only one of a straight and superb gallop. Recognising familiar ground as we go, we find ourselves opening two of the bridle gates by which we canter from Melton to a meet at Piper Hole. Now we are bearing down upon the Spinney of Scalford Bog (the fences happily diminishing in size as jumping power fades); and now Capt. Ashton views the beaten fox once more just before hounds. At the little hamlet of Wykeham, midway between the villages of Scalford and Goadby Marwood, foot-people are running, shouting, and pointing on both sides. One fox has passed between the houses; but the hounds never leave their game, race him up the road, and dash into Goadby Gorse—only to worry and tear at the tiles of the artificial earth instead of wetting their teeth on his savoury sides. So a gallant fox lives—after as true and honest a gallop as ever did credit to the Quorn, or helped to make a season famous.

But seldom does it happen that a day boasting of one great gallop is blessed with another of almost equal merit. In some respects the second of to-day eclipsed the first. It was not so straight; nor was it so decisive. But hounds were going fast for a full hour before checking at all—having of course changed foxes at some period or other of the run. Had the two events taken place on different days we should certainly have credited the greater part of both to the same fox. As it is, we cannot but believe the two heroes to have been members, if not of the same family, at least of the same foraging party.

Welby Fishpond is a combinate covert of willowbed

and gorse—the latter a two-year-old growth on a sunny slope facing towards Melton (which is some three miles away). A strong cluster of men (mostly on their second horses) stood on the opposite hillside; and bold Reynard went away before their faces, almost unasked. The huntsman was out of covert, and hounds laid on in a trice. From the very first they went to work with all the briskness of the morning; dashing hotly past the little spinney of Cant's Thorns, and cutting almost at once into the line they had travelled in the merry forenoon. As then, they raced across the green meadows of Kettleby Parish; and soon afterwards crossed the Holwell waggonway for Old Hills. Now again our friend fox came to the rescue—pointing out where, and where only it was possible to cross the double-timbered barrier. A twenty-feet breach had been left in the woodwork as if for this special occasion; and by this means men were able to dive in-and-out of the Old Hills gully with the hounds, and fairly steeple-chase after them, over the road and down the valley beyond—pointing for Scalford Village exactly as in the morning. A close little knot of riders made up the first flight this afternoon—including, among others, and in addition to the few whose names have already been set down in connection with the first run, Lord Belper and Capt. O'Neal, Mr. and Mrs. Pennington, Mr. and Miss Chaplin, Major and Miss Starkey, Mr. Beaumont, Mr. Hume, Mr. Newton, &c. Most of these had held an equally good position in the former gallop; and, in truth, to the three ladies really belong the honours of the day,

for each had but one horse to depend upon—whereas Capt. Smith and Capt. King were almost the only men carried by the same horse throughout. But now hounds swung sharp to the right; carried us over the Melton-and-Scalford road; and led us over the ford below Melton Spinney (pace and ground still as good as ever). Between the covert and brook they ran on without giving us a moment's pull; and beat everyone as they turned over the hill for Thorpe Arnold. A still further bend to the left made it seem as if either their fox must be beat or that they had changed on to one of less boldness of purpose. Still they drove hard and sped on—the wet ground ready to retain any and every scent to-day. The Thorpe Arnold brook was forded; and men hurried up the plough to the Melton-and-Waltham road, straining hard to get on terms with hounds—now almost undiscernible through a quarter-of-a-mile of thin driving mist. Fox and hounds threaded the road for fully a mile-and-a-half; but some passer-by headed the former from the Broom Covert, and turned him again over this ridge of plough to the left of Waltham. Over hill and dale (now again upon grass) men—and even the ladies mentioned—struggled on with tired and fainting horses. In this plight they had to jump the little brook by Chaldwell village; and shortly afterwards found themselves at Wykeham, close to where the last run had ended. A sudden turn back brought them again to the brook, over which they had just scrambled; and those who had strength enough left under them rejoined many comrades who had failed to cross the stream at all. The

country side—and especially the Waltham road—was by this time freely dotted with beaten horses; and a gallop could scarcely have been raised among the little party still with hounds. But, for the first time since the find, the pack now came to slower hunting—and thus they worked back to Melton Spinney. At every moment was a kill expected, and ardently prayed for. But failing light and failing horses put an end to the hope: and, as the hunt again reached the edge of Melton Spinney, Mr. Coupland decided to give the word for home, and to leave the covert undisturbed.

The following will speak for itself as having been penned previous to the above brilliant Monday.

To conclude the first week of the New Year—Friday, Jan. 4th, was perhaps the hottest day, Saturday certainly the wettest, of a so far unbroken season. A New Year, besides pointing its thousand morals, means that another season is already half over—and we wake to the fact almost ere thoroughly warmed to work. Late weeks—though open, pleasant, and redolent of health and good company—have been marked with but few strong episodes to instance and notify the lapse of time. We have gone a-hunting as regularly as we have come home with a staunch appetite, and seldom without sport—often indeed with a flush of it. The only anxiety for the morrow has been the horse, a decently sound horse, and a horse that would do us no discredit. A second-rate brute is certain, in ten minutes at the most, to show up himself, and you, in this drastic country and company. He may not fall. He may gallop; he may not refuse;

he may scramble over the line. But he puts you at the mercy, and as it were at the feet, of others. He does what he is obliged; and does that badly. He has no soul, no enterprise, no love for the business—and dares you to indulge in the ephemeral prompting of ambitious fooling. You can't leave him at home; for what with the young ones going lame, and the old ones going sore, the weather mild, everybody hunting every day, he must take his turn—and you (not I, for we never confess to our failures) must make the best of a bad bargain.

But, as I was about to say, runs sterling, fast, and decisive—such as we like to consider and report as typical of Leicestershire—have not been freely illustrating the pages of its recent history. A grand and very venerable authority, the Rev. John Russell (whose lately published Memoirs should move the heart of every fox-hunter) gave it as a doctrine that there "is never a scent on a quite still day." Now the weather of late has been heavy, dull and oppressive—and the sport has kept tune to it. If I may dare to propose an amendment on a subject so inscrutable, I would suggest *autumn stillness and winter wind* (never a brewing or growing storm) as possible conditions—founded on recent seasons. But let older heads rebuke me—bidding me Hold my peace, and Look out for a run that may come at any time!

Barometer and thermometer, however, had better be put to a practical use—if comfort in riding be an object. I mean on the minor point of how to clothe. Hot leathers and Newmarket "sweaters" (I make no apology for touching on articles of apparel that in these en-

lightened days are held to be not out of place on feminine lips, nor even, I am induced to believe, on feminine limbs and frames) should not be donned when thermometer registers 45° and barometer is at the top of the tree with a southerly wind. Positively it was a shocking spectacle on Friday, to the eye of anyone who set store on the personal appearance of his intimate friends! A melting mood in practical sympathy might well be pardoned to the observer, when all around him were bathed in a midday moisture defying any delicate synonym. And all this in pursuit of a twisting, twirling fox—or rather, of hounds they could not reach, by reason of the devastating railway that ruins the Scraptoft and Keyham region. If any individual exception could combat the overpowering heat it was the bold rider "whose cheeks were fanned, on the other hand, by the galloping grey, seen bolting away" (For remainder, see Ingarsby Legends, Trial Canto).

This Quorn Friday commenced at Keyham, with all the honours of a *fête* Leicestrian and a show of equipage and equestrianism that did credit to our flourishing city. But the element flooding the covertside at Scraptoft was the schoolboys—who came in such shoals as Leech never dreamed of when he drew his picture of Home for the Holidays. What funny little fellows on funny little nags were many of them! I am not referring thus presumptuously to the sturdy thrusters just sprouting into manhood—who are dubbed *mashers* almost ere breeched and birched, and who are encased in collars so lofty that their young elders of Melton and Meynell have been utterly

put to shame, and are now forced to hold a double-round-choker to be the only proper throat lash for hunting-men over twenty-and-three. No, these upper teens are a splendid body of rising chivalry—that will replace us and oust us, long before we want to clear out, or have even reached the stage of heading foxes by "sinking the wind." But it is noticeable at this festive and family period that men, with whom "only the other day" we were contentedly classed as "young fellows," are now to be seen each with his ruddy offspring (single, double, or in triplets) behind him—the youngsters on shaggy ponies, which cheerfully and confidingly hob-nob against the paternal hocks and make our blood run cold by titivating the flank of the most notorious kicker in the field. Papa's quiver would probably stand a call upon it quite as readily as his sorely tried purse. But Providence has fortunately more consideration for the former than for the latter—and the small Nimrods survive to be paid for, in spite of all the perils of a Quorn Friday.

The Scraptoft fox turned at Ingarsby after his first mile, and when there was no apparent need for his doing so. Afterwards he had little choice, as he found himself amid chains of carriages and streams of horsemen. But stealing away from the entanglement he made nearly a six-mile point to Gaddesby, by way of Barkby Holt, and was rattled to death in three cheese-plate circles round a stiff close country twixt Gaddesby and Queniboro'. (An hour and a half of hot hard work, at least for the man who had to kill him.) I wish the same end had been in store for the Ashby Pastures fox of the afternoon—the

same, no doubt, that about three weeks ago also zig-zagged so curiously. Well, he played the same trick to-day, to a still less temperate field—and, believe me, not even a hound was killed. But he must soon surely have the death of a couple or two at his door—unless his mask is speedily nailed over the kennel, or these Quorn Fridays are held at Bunney.

Saturday, Jan. 5, opened so fair and fine for the Cottesmore meet at Pickwell that we had never a thought of a wetting, and there was never a waterproof—scarcely a shabby coat or hat—in the field. About this time of the year we begin to replenish our kits, or to bring coat or habit out of the silver paper from which we were loath to release it too soon. And a lawn meet such as Pickwell, whereat at least three Hunts will be represented, must ever constitute an occasion demanding our smartest apparel. So we were all smiles at the meet—unless the new garment was not forthcoming, and the old one was felt to be wofully threadbare, or—worse still—if the new vestment of our heart's vanity was felt to be a misfit and a failure. But exactly in a contrary ratio did our spirits rise or fall, when the drenching rain began as we neared the Punchbowl. But this has little to do with the sport. Nor, for once, had the Punchbowl. It was with the second fox that a straight gallop of five-and-twenty minutes was enacted, to put men on pleasant terms with themselves and the day. They found him in Berry Gorse; and, though in three fields it was obvious that there was only *half* a scent, he kept his head bravely up the wind—and hounds made all possible capital of the indulgence. They took

us a right good line—and fortunately did not hurry us over the brook on the Burton Flat. Three or four men jumped it; many others scrambled in and out; and there was ample time to go round. But over the top of Gartree Hill (just avoiding the covert) they made the pace much better; and, leaving Great Dalby to the right, went straight and nicely to the earths between Adam's Gorse and Thorpe Satchville in the Quorn country. Had the test, of country and pace, been yet more severe, there were riders with hounds quite equal to meeting it—for instance Mr. Baird, Lord Manners, Major Starkey, Capt. Smith, Capt. Blair, Messrs. Barclay, Beaumont, Brocklehurst, Arthur Coventry, Deschamps, G. Farquhar, Jacobson, Marshall, Pennington.

CHAPTER XIV.

ONE WEEK'S WORK.

THE sport of such a season as this puts a heavy —even if a happy—burden on the poor recorder. He has all the difficulties with which others are contending—*e.g.* a stricken purse, overworked horses, an infatuated zest for the sport, perhaps a feeble frame—supported only by a healthy appetite and after-dinner somnolence, and a strong dislike to remaining at home in fair hunting weather when others are riding gaily to hounds over (may I repeat the well-tried assertion?) the very best countries in England. To see the sport, he should be abroad and in the saddle. To write of it, he should be at home with the pen. If the Gulf Stream has really changed its course and warm winters are to be the steady rule, *The Field* should in common fairness go with the tide and provide each of its correspondents with an amanuensis, who shall put our post-prandial memories into more readable shape than can be expected of drowsy frames and rein-worn fingers. Even the luxury of an honest cropper must be denied to the weekly scribbler, lest its effects should interfere with

his Thursday's wool-gathering. And yet even he cannot be carried to hounds in a band-box.

Given open and favourable weather, January must at all times be the best and steadiest hunting month of the year. All the foxes are then strong and capable; and horses and hounds have just attained thoroughness of condition. A pack must run level now (temporary and trifling ailments duly considered) if, as it should be, it is built without a tail and topped of that most mischievous of all incumbrances, a runaway head. Horses can now do forty minutes without distress, where seventeen would have settled them in November. And this year we ride above ground and gallop and jump with the turf springing under us. Ah, 'tis a jolly season! Shall we look for many like it?

The Quorn and the Belvoir put their stamp on the concluding days of the week ending January 12th—carrying on the wave of sport, and proving once more how a brilliant scent will come for a period rather than for isolated days. Nothing could—to all appearance—have been more unfavourable than Friday, with black clouds being driven across the sky in a gale of wind, and a storm of cold rain making us all miserable before noon. The morning was horrible, the middle of the day detestable, and if we resisted example and a strong inner prompting for home (when even from Thorpe Trussels hounds were utterly helpless on an afternoon fox)—it was only from fear of the dread epithet "chalk," or from some former pitiful memory of a run achieved after we had "turned home to tea." But the huntsman laboured on,

and most of us followed—holding to our hats, and in the bustle of movement at least beginning to cease our shivering and feel our feet. If the country was familiar, one could not fail to mark that the snug little copse of Adam's Gorse was not altogether left out of calculation in the huntsman's final cast. We remembered that foxes were said to have been bred here; and we knew that hounds had not been in it this season. So possibly we were near enough to see the whip's cap go up, and hounds spring forth without horn or holloa. The old Burrough steeplechase course—some of the nicest riding and best scenting-ground in the Hunt's possession—lies just over the brow; and right merrily now we all larked over it—led by Lord Rathdonnell, Mr. Farquhar, and the rider of all others to whom it has been a scene of triumph in the past. Hounds were close after their fox; and did not mean to let the advantage slip—though, twice before reaching Gartree Hill, he left the open fields and followed the roads like a deer. The storms had passed away, and the evening was bright and clear. Scent had improved wonderfully; and they ran on at once, fast as before, even over several deep rough ploughs beyond the covert. Regaining the grass they reached Berry Gorse, and held on across the Burton Flat at a fast hunting pace—till they reached the river opposite Brentingby. Leaving one or two of their pursuers in a branch stream, and forcing on all but Mr. Leatham a long detour, they were soon in Mr. Burbage's Covert, and very soon out of it. By this time they had been running more than half an hour; and their fox was rapidly coming to hand. So, though he gained some

little ground at the village of Burton Lazars, they easily tired him down in another turn across the Flat, ran him from scent to view, and pulled him down as he reached a little spinney within a quarter of a mile of Stapleford Park. To bring off a run so satisfactory on a day so unpropitious, was another laurel leaf in the Quorn wreath of '83 84. This chase occupied altogether about an hour, and covered an area between five and six miles in diameter.

The Belvoir on Saturday (Jan. 12th) ran us nearly all to a standstill, in a tremendous gallop backwards and forwards between their own country and that of the Quorn. A slight rime frost and a bright sun rather hindered sport in the morning; but made the day a delightful contrast to blustering yesterday (the bitter chill of which seemed to cling to our very marrow still). So from Old Hills they hunted under difficulties for upwards of an hour, crossing the border, and proceeding to return the compliment paid by the Quorn on the previous Monday. After escaping from Holwell and its labyrinth of iron tramway, after passing Kettleby and nearly reaching Wartnaby, the hunt seemed to be over and luncheon became the order of the day. Happy they who seized it, and their second horses, before the alarm was sounded—or rather was whispered in startled accents—that the fox had jumped up in view, and hounds were *away*. Away they truly were, with a long long start—running very differently from the toilsome fashion of the morning. A mile of gates took us by Welby Fishpond, another mile of bridleroad landed half-way back to Old Hills; and

now the first whip had reached the hounds, and we could at least take our direction from them, instead of remaining longer mere blind atoms of a rushing torrent. Beyond Old Hills things became pleasanter still. And the hurry became less for a moment as we neared Scalford Village, by which time horses were already panting and choking. Here again we were in an entanglement of railways—and the sad disaster that had befallen the Fitzwilliam the day before came vividly to mind. The beautiful Belvoir dogs, however, threaded the network unscathed—followed through the intricacies by some few horsemen, among whom Mr Watson of Carlow was a prominent figure. The rest of us clattered the road through the village; and the whole party reunited as hounds turned along the brow to Melton Spinney. One couple of hounds drove over the bordering fallow right into the covert; but the body (probably on a fresh fox) bore yet more to the right and dashed on faster than ever. The ford let us through the brook beneath the covert, and an archway let us under the railway, and so we hurried towards Melton. The line of country hitherto crossed had, with the exception of the difficulties about Scalford Village, been remarkably easy. It was the same for yet another mile or so; but, as horses grew tired and lungs gave out, the fences became less amenable—and natural, and heavy, consequences followed. Each field saw some new falling off, or falling down; and as hounds passed behind Sysonby their following was not a tenth part of that of the forenoon. Still at a racing pace—and again over a useful well-gated country—the

pack regained Welby Fishpond; but, as before, passed without touching the covert, and turned leftward towards Ashfordby. At length—after forty-five minutes' incessant hard going—there came the long-needed check. But in another minute they were off once more, and the appalling environs of Ashfordby were entered. To ride over the close giant fences surrounding this village is a very high trial to the best of horses in his first freshness. To find a way across them now was an obvious impossibility; and road-riding became again compulsory. The delighted satire of the village wits was freely flung after the jaded and mud-bespattered party. But the latter, surviving the ordeal, made up their ground quickly by the aid of the resounding granite; and were soon able to rejoin the pack among the pastures towards Grimston. Of a sudden hounds stopped short by a brookside plantation—every head going up as if in doubt and wonder. Those who noticed the occurrence seem to agree that here again ensued another change of foxes. For, after this, the scent altered, and the fox before them had strength to reach Shoby Scoles at least five minutes in advance. But still they ran on—hunting their own way, though no longer with fire and pace—to within half a mile of Hoby Village. Thence in the fast-failing light they worked back almost to Asfordby, giving up the pursuit at 4.30. For some time the moon had been eking out the twilight; and quite two hours and a half had been spent in severe running and hunting between two points seven miles apart, and much of the ground being covered twice over. The horses ridden by Gillard

and Arthur might perhaps have lasted a while longer; but, with the exception of one or two second (or third?) horses recently picked up, scarcely another steed had a gallop left in him. The remaining horsemen consisted, if I am not mistaken, only of the Duke of Portland, Major Starkey, Captains Boyce, Smith, and Tennent; Messrs. Beaumont, B. Burdett Coutts, Crawley, G. Drummond, Foster, Knowles, Lubbock, Praed and Pryor—with Down's little son on the tiniest of ponies!

With a kill after those forty-five minutes—and never was a kill more truly earned—this run would have been held a great event even in this truly wonderful season.

Monday, January 14th, too, with the Quorn, was again more than an ordinary day. A first fox run down in an hour; and a second escaping only, and almost literally, by the skin of his eyes, at the end of forty-three minutes—may be taken as leading facts that almost speak for themselves. The former was a handsome feat; the latter was a brisker, smarter, event—having no claim to great honour, but thorough sharp foxhunting from a curious beginning to a luckless end (I am not going to tell; the fox is a dumb animal; and the huntsman never flings his tongue rashly).

The sport began at Thrussington Gorse (this year a very fertile and fruitful spot). We had heard a dim rumbling in covert—which might, or might not, have meant a fox caught asleep. But this passed; and the huntsman's long-drawn note bade us move on to some

other place of search—when a pair of keen and well-practised Yorkshire eyes found their reflex in a gorse bush just over the bordering edge. Reynard at once confessed himself stared out of countenance; gave up all further hope of concealment; and was off. All the chief merit of this run lay with the huntsman. He worked it up into a sharp finish and a meritorious end, and brought his fox cleverly to hand. All the earlier part of his labour was down a west wind, and before a field of horsemen that left him and his hounds none too much time. With a quick scent the pack might have slipped everyone at Thrussington Wolds, so straight and sharp did their fox cut through the little wood and dodge the plough teams beyond. (If ploughing and shepherding were solely summer pursuits, how much straighter would our foxes run!) But, after a half-circle towards Old Dalby, we once more found ourselves returning by Lord Aylesford's covert and clustered for awhile above the basin of Shoby Scoles. Thence up wind, over the old pastures of the Hoby Lordship was the brightest part of the journey, to all save misguided Reynard—who might easily have trotted out of scent into the vale of Belvoir. But so it was: and so they hustled him up the breeze nearly to Cossington Gorse, and ate him almost on the lawn of Ragdale Hall.

Walton Thorns for an afternoon fox and a new line—a direction almost unknown to modern Quornites, but one that they are only too ready to ride again as soon as opportunity may be provided. North and north-west of Six Hills (the central point of their Monday country) is

a wild, but almost level, upland district—spreading for many miles in poor and often self-sown grass, that carries a scent under almost any conditions of wind and weather. (They went over much of it, about three weeks since, in their great and lengthy run from Bunney Park.) Other merits possessed by this unfamiliar region are that it is slenderly inhabited, that it owns and requires very little draining, riding wet and sound throughout the winter, and that its hedges are just what you would pick out as schooling-material for a very third-rate or untaught horse. Indeed, I am inclined to think that—taking into consideration the further fact that the ditches are never cleared of briars and grass—an indifferent hunter, well cautioned with whip and spur for each fresh effort, is really a safer conveyance over such trifles than a bold flighty horse that would toy with an oxer. At least, if such is not the case (paradoxical as the theory may seem), Monday showed that much money has been spent in vain, and that even a couple of hundred (paid, too, on the nail) will not always keep a horse on his legs. So much for the country over which we now disported for some forty and odd minutes. Our fox went well and far when once fairly started on his way. But foxes see, and perhaps imagine, as many dangers besetting their path as we find in ours—their objects of dread being man and beast, ours the mere frail creation of carpenter, hedge-cutter, and over-fed fancy. In his first curious turn hounds ran over, and snapped up, another fox nestled in a fallow; but after leaving Mr. Cradock's Spinney they held forward in a

distinct direction, and faster as they went. In ten minutes more the inquiry as to "where we were" went in vain from mouth to mouth—so new and unridden was the region. We found our whereabouts for the moment, as we passed above Wimeswold village and threatened Cossington Gorse; but speedily lost it again till some single individual could explain that the village just before us was Wysall. Hounds were driving very sharply now—running for blood, their fox scarcely one field before them. Well, his good fortune had a prior claim. And there my story ends.

On Thursday January 17th, Mr. Coupland gave a byeday at Prestwold to the Loughboro' ball-goers. The Melton division also trooped in to join the colours; and the Master could not do less than adapt his bill of fare to the occasion created. So after Hoton New Spinney he trotted on to Ellar's Gorse—but our old and worshipful acquaintance was not to be caught napping, even on a byeday, and stole away as soon as he heard the cavalcade trotting down the road.

A brilliant burst from the Curate, however, retrieved the day, and revived the sinking spirits of the weary ones, who had trifled so unadvisedly with hours that—at least while sport and weather last—should be devoted only to carrying us forward from hunting-day to hunting-day. I should have mentioned that a weak fox had already been run into in ten minutes from Willoughby Gorse. But the one from the Curate gave two and thirty minutes' rapid and excellent fun, before the pack bowled him over in the vale by Hickling. Post time

precludes full particulars. But though hounds were baffled at starting by a sheepdog, they never left the line again, dipped into the Vale of Belvoir at Upper Broughton, hung most of their followers up among the wire by Nether Broughton, did the same in that horrid and dastardly network by Sherbrooke's Covert (after crossing the Broughton brook and causing much grief also there), and swept into their fox in a big pasture adjoining Hickling Church. As far as I can venture to express an opinion, three heavy weights, Capt. Townshend, the Duke of Portland, and Mr. Knowles beat all the lighter men.

A little story comes to light this week illustrating only too lamentably the uncertain reward of humanity. All sportsmen are by nature sympathetic and humane—even though the feeling carries them quite as often with the pursuer as with the object of his pursuit. Is not the following a nice instance of overstrained benevolence? His Lordship's hounds had their fox almost *in extremis* —as may be guessed from the fact that he took refuge in the outhouse of an old lady's cottage. The kindly dame, perceiving his entrance, promply turned the key —vowing that, come what might, the poor tired thing should have a night's lodging and refuge from his enemies. Hounds and huntsmen bustled about her tenement in vain inquiry; while the old lady hugged the secret and her key, and indulged in gentle chuckling over her deed of mercy. The cruel marauders retired in disappointment; the good soul went to bed to dream of charity and kindness to all creation—leaving her lodger

to a night of well-earned rest. Rising earlier than usual next morning, and having studiously refrained from communicating her cherished secret to a soul, she quietly opened the outhouse door; and with a scream of delight—bordering in the ecstacy of the moment closely on a view holloa—saw her furry guest rush gaily out, with frame invigorated and with brush erect. This would

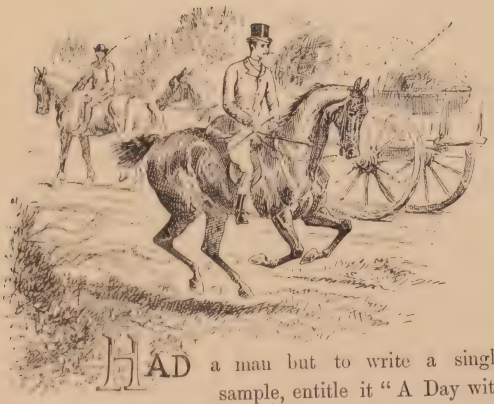
"SAW HER FURRY GUEST RUSH GAILY OUT."

indeed be a triumph—an act of beneficence duly scored—a feat to be reproduced in minutest detail at many a cosy tea table! Had poor Reynard been comfortable? Had he found a warm corner and curled himself on a soft couch of sweet-smelling hay? Better still, he had made himself a *feather bed* in the very middle of the floor. Oh, heavens!—those two Dorking pullets, pure bred and already laying! Heads and tails, wings and feet lay scattered in miserable testimony. She had nursed a

viper in her bosom—and her lamentations rent the air as she unfolded her bitter tale to her convulsed and heartless fellow-villagers. The scent of a fox appeals no more strongly to the nose of a hound than the mere name of the artful one now stinks in the nostrils of this kind old lady. *I nunc, ingratis, offer te irrisc periclis.*

CHAPTER XV.

E. G.



HAD a man but to write a single sample, entitle it "A Day with the Quorn," and set to work upon it as if the army of hunting correspondents and descriptors had never been called into being to wear a subject to its barest threads —he might do worse than take Friday, January 18th, for his subject. He would begin of course by drawing a lively picture of the gay meet before the old feudal Hall, descant upon the bevy of brightness and beauty on

the stone portal steps, enumerate a score or two of the brave gentlemen—clad so trimly, even gaudily, yet with every point of their dainty attire so admirably adapted for work—making their bow before mounting. He might even pay a graceful tribute to the cup of welcome in waiting within; and thus refreshed (metaphorically only, if his wisdom teeth be cut and the healthy recklessness of early youth be his no longer) proceed to scan and of course eulogise the pack which, by the way, never looks so little worth eulogy as when shivering and petulantly whining on a lawn. He would put each man on his "well-known" brown, bay, grey, or chesnut—though Melton alone has on its books about three hundred horses, extraordinarily well-known to each Meltonian, it is true, but lost from their very confusion of number to all the *profanum vulgus* beyond the walls of the metropolis, and at least a hundred of which are at the present time mere stable adornments—flourishing in leg buckets like hyacinths in drawing-room glasses, under the ruthless exaction of an uninterrupted season. As a matter of fact, the good old-fashioned sportsman, who never fails to give himself, and the horse that is to carry him all day, at least ten minutes alongside the pack at the meet, is a rare bird on these waters. His sprightlier prototype never goes to covert at less than three parts speed, and would as soon think of being first man at a ball as an early lounger at a meet. A smoking hack, a cool hunter—another to follow—"good morning" while galloping across the first field from covert, "good night" at the last check, twelve miles an hour home, a hearty meal at

5, a heavy one at 8.30, perhaps early to nap, and late to bed—"Oh," as the ex-guardsman exclaimed regretfully of his "liquor-and-cards days," "them was times!" And this is how they do it now-a-days.

Having described all this, with a breadth of touch, a depth of intimacy, and a license of fancy that are altogether denied to the correspondent who makes one of the daily party, and whose utmost indulgence must at least be within the bounds allowed by the kindly good fellowship that allows him to do his work at all—the casual sketcher might employ a page of his book in depicting a view that, backed by the striking and historic mound of the Coplow, appeals to the not-unromantic eye of the sportsman as powerfully as any scrap of scenery in the shire of Shires. With the holloa from across the valley, sending forth an outlying fox into the very midst of the camp followers spread out over the park—his pen and that of the weekly journalist must travel in the same practical groove, and move onward, more or less soberly, together. This hapless fox started with none of the honours of war or circumstance of sport. No hero of a gallant fight was he to be—no glorious victim whose every relic should be counted a worthy trophy—though his heart may have been as courageous and his limbs as stout as those of any traveller that ever defied the Quorn. He woke in his stubblefield to find himself face to face with some noisy varlet, bethought him at once of Baggrave or Ashby Pastures or other distant refuge, and pointed thither—only to be pounced upon in Quenby Park by as fierce and persistent a colley dog as ever

savaged a sheep or spoiled a run. The shepherd dog was speedy enough to have coursed a hare, bundled poor Reynard over in fifty yards, and never left him till the latter dragged his half-worried frame into a rabbit-hole, by the railway-side.

Then was the order given for Billesdon Coplow, and thence was the run—one hour and thirty-five minutes, over a wild strong country, with the death of a grand fine fox as a finish.

Botany Bay, a dense blackthorn covert at the foot of The Coplow's wooded height, forms the real strength of that time-and-song-honoured landmark. Though a road bounds it on two sides, and the throng always spreads round its outskirts on every side, it is difficult even for a Quorn Friday field altogether to envelope it, or to prevent a really bold fox from making his course. The centre ride is the usual rendezvous for men who would be ready to take any direction suggested by fox and hounds—and nine times out of ten this is over the Coplow hill. To-day was neither an exception nor a trial of patience—for scarcely was the muddy ride fairly lined than the clear air was broken by a chorus of halloas from beneath the House, and Mr. Coupland galloped out to set hounds on the line of a ready rover. Through the gardens and round the base of the covert-clad slope facing the village of Billesdon scurried the anxious horsemen—blinded for a while to what the hounds might be doing, but knowing only too well how difficult a country lay beyond, and how often they had toiled over its steep green acclivities in vain pursuit of a fast-vanishing pack. For the rough

broken hills 'twixt The Coplow and Tilton, or Skeffington, carry a flying scent, grow whitethorn and blackthorn in their stoutest shape, and so put a hunter to a test requiring the climbing powers of a Welsh pony as well as all the jumping talent of a Leicestershire hunter. Now, the earliest and most eager had not circled the base ere the leading hounds were seen breasting the opposite slope, on which is situated what is always known as Tomlin's Spinney. Two ploughed fields fill the interval, and a well knitted stake-and-bound opposes the rider halfway up the hill. Mr. G. Farquhar and Mr. H. T. Barclay surmounted this, and were climbing to the brow, at about the same pace and angle as flies on a window pane, as Firr galloped down from the Coplow with the body of the pack at his heels. Arrived at the summit, the two were seen to separate—then, poising for a moment on different points to scan the deep gullies beyond, disappeared as utterly as the half dozen couples of which they rode in search. So, from one hilltop to another, the pair skirmished onward to keep the foremost couples in sight; and occasional glimpses, now of Mr. Farquhar's black coat, now of Mr. Barclay's shooting jacket (the dishabille in keeping with a recent crushing and scarce-recovered fall), now of the chestnut whisking through a bullfinch, now of the bay topping a binder, beckoned us, and guided the huntsman, in the required direction. For a mile or so, over these rough hills and pitches, the chase pointed towards Tilton; then, bending suddenly to the right, made Skeffington its apparent line. Shepherd and hedgecutter were sounding a shrill duet

on the hillside near Billesdon windmill—gladly laying aside crook and billhook to throw all their energies into voice and gesture and assume a part in "killing the fox." If hunting ever ceases in the merry Midlands (of which in all seriousness and sobriety we may surely hope it may not) it will certainly never be through the ill-will of the labouring classes on the spot. Every villager learns to throw a view halloa, from the hour that as a schoolboy he cheers the jaded and irresponsive "hoonter"—or, as they often term him in his working robe, the "redman" on his homeward way. Every ploughman (a vocation, however, that in the grass countries has but a limited demand) or farm labourer, whatever may be his employ, looks to having his task pleasantly interrupted by horn and hound at intervals during the winter months—and never fails at once to break off work, lending all his interest to the passing chase. (I cannot, by the way, resist embodying in a brief parenthesis a summary of occupation given me not many days ago, by a young rustic working in the state of life in which he found himself called. He earned a shilling a day, too—considerably more than an ensign or sub-lieutenant when his kit is paid for. "What was his chief job on the farm?" Answer—"Knocking clods." "Good boy. And what else?" Answer—"Gathering clods." Now, I appeal to that worshipful body, the Schoolboard—does not a round of labour, so comprehensive, varied and intellectual, of itself demand an occasional break, if only to prevent the overstrained mind of the clodhopper from slipping back to the level whence it is supposed to have

been recently raised?) But this is the class to whom, of all others, we most often owe cheery news of a fox in front. Now its two representatives pointed gleefully where Reynard had passed close by. "*Such* a big 'un, he wur!" And such a big 'un he proved to be when Firr brushed him an hour and a quarter later. At this moment the huntsman got all his hounds to the head; and, with the pack fully massed, found himself in a country almost new to him, from his Quorn experience. They had crossed the Uppingham turnpike (the marginal line separating the hunting grounds of Sir Bache Cunard from those of the Quorn and Cottesmore. Skeffington was on his left, Billesdon on his right, Rolleston in front, and a wide sweeping succession of grassy hill-and-vale all round. But, though the pace had been fast till now —faster because of the difficulties that separated men from hounds— it failed rather than improved under bettered conditions. They went steadily on, however, to Rolleston, past its covert, and out beyond towards Goadby. A sharp turn to the left, and (by common consent and encomium) some beautiful hunting, took them to Keythorpe. Round the succession of spinneys of that domain they followed their fox, and set afoot a brace of others. But, happily averting a threatened change, the huntsman dropped on to his now exhausted quarry, drove him through another small plantation, and, in two fields more, had the gratification and triumph of standing over his stiffened remains on open ground.

CHAPTER XVI.

HEARSAY.

HEARSAY is a commodity of so little value that men of the world (am I right in excluding the other sex?) accept it as so much loose chaff, fit only to form a plaything for the winds, or to accumulate in the stray corners of naturally empty minds—seldom, if ever, to be gathered and stored for the sake of any tangible worth it may possess. But such a proper and well-earned estimate is, like all other dogmatism, open to exception. Hearsay in the shape of a mere *on dit*—which, out of an indifferent acquaintance with Gallic idioms, I take to infer the vapid utterance of nobody in particular, but rather the mere chance gossip which embraces every topic, affecting intimacy with each, and proving no knowledge of any—is obviously worthless, but is rightly held by the world at large as being only a convenient medium through which to discuss in safety, and with some additional piquancy, the affairs of their neighbours. *On dit*-ship, indeed, is of itself a branch of science, in which, of our frailty, we are all too prone to dabble; but the professors of which carry with them a weight altogether out of proportion to the

school they represent or the art they demonstrate. An *on dit*-man fulfils a very important function in society. I don't think that his fellow males regard him greatly—though womenkind delight in him, and to them he is invaluable. He is the essential oil of their social gatherings—whether these take the form of "little dinners" or the lower grade of small tea-parties. "He knows so much about people, and has such a pleasant way of communicating it;" and so will keep a whole table amused, upon topics in which they can all display an interest. He has a *rôle* to perform, a character to maintain—and he is not going to mar the one or lose the other for lack of information. It is nobody's duty—and scarcely anybody's inclination—to "give him the lie" when he trips gaily and pleasantly over the bounds of truth into the fascinating fields of fiction. And the mischief he does is worthy of the master who prompts him.

But hearsay of a different kind—and in a sense quite opposed to that of chance gleaning from stray utterance—that is to say, information acquired on a particular subject from a practical mind striving only to convey facts—should suffer little by having to be committed to writing by a middleman. Yet I believe there is no topic under the sun on which it is more difficult to arrive at satisfactory detail and estimate at the mouth of others than a run with hounds. (Of my own shortcomings in this direction as narrator and commentator I am fully, honestly, and lamentably conscious.) A very fast run is seen but by a very few—even in this essentially hard-riding country. Those few are up in their stirrups; have

been drinking nectar with the gods; and are rapturous over the Elysium of which they have had a glimpse. Am I right in saying that their number seldom exceeds half a dozen—the every move and turn of whom has depended on what they could see of the leading hounds? Certainly I am, in referring to our best and strongest country—and leaving out altogether the great open hills of High Leicestershire, where men must more often ride in the distant wake of hounds than comfortably *to* them—for the fences do not offer openings enough for more, and the very crowd prohibits even the keenest and readiest riders from invariably securing a front place. Of these fortunate few, the best man of all perhaps is one who, though he has ridden the country for twenty years, still gathers a double enjoyment from his hunting in never knowing where he is; another is a new comer, riding his hardest in a strange country, or even perhaps a foreigner who can scarcely find his way to the meets; a third has been riding a "handful," who left him no leisure for looking about him; a fourth lives for steeple-chasing, and regards the hounds only as so many moveable, and often inconvenient, flags; a fifth, who knows every yard of ground for twenty miles round, has slipped off directly after the gallop to catch a train to London—and you are very lucky if you can get hold of the sixth, with a guarantee that he is communicative, accurate, intimate with the country, and not disposed to crab the run because his old bay mare could not quite go the pace with the galloping quads of Nos. 1 and 4. Then the other hard—but for the nonce unlucky—men cannot

help feeling a trifle sulky; and be they the best fellows in the world—as they probably are—it would be asking too much of human nature, to expect them to invest the gallop with the rosy surroundings it perhaps deserves, or to be eloquent on what they have avowedly and unhappily "missed." The larger mass aver they have "had a splendid run, and have enjoyed themselves immensely"—though they have not seen a hound all the way, and can tell you little more than that the fox was found in one place, killed in another, adding very possibly that "they were well in it." The last-named authorities are, however, usually good timekeepers. A good, but not racing, run again gives wider opportunity of observation, and consequently greater facility for imparting the information required—though even under these bettered circumstances many events will be found described from the point of view of *quot homines tot sententiæ;* and each man cannot but temper his opinion by the measure in which he has enjoyed himself. A bad or even indifferent run puts us out of the difficulty—for as a matter of either description or memory it is as well consigned at once to oblivion.

But, among the many sterling sportsmen at all times prepared to seize their share of the fun, who have outlived jealousy, have bought experience, acquired an intimate knowledge of country, and who hunt for hunting's sake, there are always to be found some who are not only capable, but willing, to convey a just outline of events and scene. And kindly comrades as these ever are amid the stirring fellowship of the field, their

sympathy flows still more readily in the time of need and helplessness.*

Wild and stormy as were the two final days of last week (January 25 and 26), Hearsay avers stoutly and circumstantially that they were replete with sport. The morning of Friday certainly seemed to settle into temporary and comparative calm; the Quorn met at Ashby Folville; and it called for no great stretch of fancy to credit Ashby Pastures with another fox, or Fortune's favourite pack with another goodly run. No matter what visions may have visited a bedside, or what yearnings have made the heart sick—the following is what happened out of doors. The meagre sport of the forenoon (wherein Tom Firr was the animal most closely and generally hunted) served its purpose in reducing the field to a moiety of its grosser self; and Ashby Pastures became the sheet-anchor of the afternoon, to a sterling and well-horsed company. These had their mettle first tested by a hot and cheery ring of some ten minutes over the Ashby grass—regaining the Pastures with their fox already half-burst. The field then kept to the Great Dalby road—while hounds threaded the wood on their left hand, to emerge at the lower end and close at their fox. Rising the next hill, they left Sanham considerably to the right; and though plough lay in the way almost till Eye Kettleby Lodge, the pack never faltered for a moment. Successfully overcoming (*i. e.* the hounds) or

* It will be understood that an accident in the field had rendered the author a temporary cripple, and dependent altogether upon kindly friends for knowledge of passing events.

HALF-A-DOZEN OTHERS FILLED IN THE PICTURE WITH SUCCESS OR DISASTER

avoiding (*i. e.* the people) the difficulties of the North-Western line, they then followed the Burton Lane—hounds taking the strongly enclosed meadows on the left, people the deep muddy cart track, till they reached the Melton and Oakham road about the site of the Old Burton tollbar. I should have mentioned that their fox had held not more than a hundred-and-fifty yards lead as he re-entered Ashby Pastures; and he maintained about the same relative position at the point last-named. But he was by no means killed yet. He kept straight forward over the road, across the great grass fields and the river into Mr. Burbage's Covert, found the thick blackthorn too stifling to breathe in, so cut through the corner of it at once, re-swam the river, and struggled on for Stapleford. A forward view allowed huntsmen and riders generally to cross the angle without nearing the ford; and now it became only a question of avoiding a change to ensure a speedy kill. (More times than I like to remember have I known a beaten fox left for a fresh one on this Burton Flat). As nearly as possible would the dreaded change appear to have happened as the chase passed Mr. Hartopp's "white-rabbit" spinney, by the road side. Hounds diverged on to a crossline, just as the whip had his cap up on the sinking fox; Mr. Coupland made light of two deep fallows to get at their heads; they swung sharply to the horn, and next minute were hard after their fox into Laxton's Covert. A minute or two more hither and thither, through the covert, then a moment's dead silence, then a sudden crashing chorus and the welcome *who-whoop* over a fox

well earned and well killed. At an hour and ten minutes Hearsay states the time; while the distance from Ashby Pastures to Laxton's Covert is about six miles by flight of crow, in addition to the early ring. It may possibly be argued that the frequent and handy roads in some degree tamed the riding of the run; but, let that be as it may, or as it seemed, this was a gallant and satisfactory hunt—as, I wager me, Master, huntsmen, and every sportsman out will join with Hearsay in averring.

Watching the dark clouds driven across an angry sky before a cold southerly wind, and knowing the barometer to have sustained a heavy fall—it was difficult to imagine hounds running hard on Saturday last, January 26th. But I learn that there was a rattling scent all day with the Belvoir, and that the Quorn had a good forty minutes. The former pack met at Hose, in the Vale of Belvoir: the latter at Lodge-on-the-Wolds, on the opposite hills towards Nottingham. Hose is nearer Melton; so fashion went with the former—and the two packs, though avoiding an absolute clash, were together in Roehoe Wood in the course of the day. And what the Meltonians saw was as follows—Hose Gorse blank; Sherbrooke's Gorse apparently so, even though its earth was duly visited and examined. A local authority, however, insisted it was tenanted; a second visit was paid; and the visitor, heaving a stone into the cavern, found a startling response in Reynard bolting right between his legs. No further time was lost in covert; hounds leaving on the goodly terms which half ensure a run from the small gorses of the midlands. Overlooking

Hickling village, and towards Parson's Thorns, is the grass-clad hill of Hickling Standard. Up this and into the breeze, hounds drove merrily ; then bent to the right over the green enclosures behind Hickling and Kinoulton. With men and horses fairly warmed, a thoroughly pictorial Leicestershire scene was, I am told, enacted. A tributary of the Smite drains the vale here ; and is neatly and deeply cut as it passes the villages named. Smooth turf leads downhill towards it, and covers the bank beyond the latter rising almost a foot higher than the take-off, and half hidden moreover by the sheltering hedge. A dozen men came at it nearly abreast. Mr. Pennington on his brown Yorkshire mare hit off, perhaps, the broadest spot, and reached the other side with a fall. Mr. Barclay and his hogmaned chestnut took some time to assure themselves that they had really arrived thither in company. Mr. Lubbock, the Duke of Portland, Mr. Pryor and the first whip got over in safety ; while, according as luck directed or horseflesh failed them, Mr. Beaumont, Count Kaunitz, Mr. G. Paget, Mr. A. Brocklehurst, and half a dozen others filled in the picture with success or disaster. (On this head I refrained from demanding further details from Hearsay.) Turning now towards the upper ground, hounds left Kinoulton "Gorse" a little to the right, and made up a capital twenty minutes into Rochoe Wood. Running the length of it, they pointed for Wynstay Gorse ; till a shepherd dog put a veto on their movements in that direction, and drove their fox back through the covert. At this moment Firr's unmistakable

voice rang up the wood; and the followers of the two packs found themselves commingling—Mr. Sherbrooke, indeed, leaving the Quorn (the nearer pack in the morning) went on with the Belvoir, to see their fox killed from his own covert. This was effected when—after slower hunting round The Parson's—the circle was all but completed, and their beaten fox got to ground in the bank of the Smite, at no great distance from Sherbrooke's Gorse. A full term of law was no use to his stiffened limbs; and when bolted he was speedily caught. Time to ground, one hour and three minutes. Then they went to Clawson Thorns, on the other edge of the Vale, ran hard for some ten minutes on the upper ground, when the pack divided—the stronger lot, with the whip trying to stop them, plunging through Piper Hole Gorse, and killing their fox some little distance beyond it. Gillard, meantime, stuck to his line with three couple and a half—the latter proving the scent by running very fast for another eighteen minutes, by Scalford Bog and Goadby Bullamore, near which the missing whip reappeared—with the body of the pack, the head of his fox, and a dirty coat. Thence they quickly reached Stathern Point, the commencement of the Belvoir Woods—forty minutes constituting the total run from Clawson Thorns, and a violent storm driving everyone homeward.

Monday, January 28th—though a Sunday visitation of frost and snow had vanished as quickly as it came—was the first indifferent link in recent coils of the Quorn daily history. *A poor day*, in less figurative language, with an accompanying epithet added by Hearsay, who is

not above considering himself injured if scent and sport are not made exactly according to his order, and who seldom fails to express himself much more tersely, pointedly, and unmistakeably than any poor penny-a-liner would dare. Nor does Hearsay invariably make the most of things unfavourable. To him a bad job is a bad job, or even "a —— bad job;" and he declines to believe, still less to urge, that there is a "best" side to it at all. Otherwise he might have qualified his condemnation of Monday, with a saving clause to the effect that plenty of foxes were found in eligible places, though also too many open holes and too little scent. Thus neither Cossington Gorse, Walton Thorns, nor Lord Aylesford's covert gave them the required and anticipated run.

Nor was Wednesday, January 30th, with the Belvoir at Waltham—though to all appearance a superb hunting day—to be included in Fortune's roll of memorable dates. To-day the foxes, rather than the scent, incurred Hearsay's meed of blame—and he even infers that he came home earlier than he might have done, through giddiness consequent on repeated short rings over the same country. It appears that the scene of the day's operations lay entirely in the Melton district — commencing with a fox from Mr. Burbage's covert. Him they ran to Stapleford, along a route coincident and interwoven with that of railway and river. The latter was brimful; and was instrumental in supplying the leading episode of the trip. Between the water and the railway runs a wedge of flat meadow-land, as far as the Brentingby Crossing; and along this peninsula rode the

bruisers of the hunt—taking all they could in their stride. At length they came to timber unjumpable, even to their liberal ideas; so one of their number jumped down to attack the barricade on foot—leaving his horse to take care of himself. This the noble animal promptly proceeded to do, by trotting down to the river bank, and coolly swimming across to join the hounds on his own

"FORTHWITH SWAM BACK AGAIN TO HIS MASTER!"

account. But no sooner had he reached the opposite side than, upon a friendly horseman riding up to catch him, he kicked his heels into the air, whinnied playfully, and forthwith swam back again to his master! (As to this little anecdote, I carefully put Hearsay on his oath, before venturing to pass it on to my readers.) The Broom Covert and thereabouts, and round-and-about, 'twixt Waltham Stonesby and Freeby—embodies the area, upon which Gillard and the Duke's pack worked hard and untiringly, killed a fox, and ran others throughout the afternoon.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE JOHN O' GAUNT GALLOP.

THAT gallop from John o' Gaunt of Friday, February 1st, would seem to have rivalled anything in the great score of the Quorn, for Mr. Coupland's marvellous — but alas, *final* — season. At the meet at Quenby that morning it was made known that the Master who has ruled our country so deftly, and given us an unbroken succession of sport for fourteen years, had determined on resigning office. Severely as the loss will be felt, the country cannot look upon it as unexpected; for the last two or three years of his Mastership have been continued in deference to the strong feeling of the country rather than in obedience to his own wish and convenience. But no one else seemed to be forthcoming who could aptly handle the reins; and so, rather than the Hunt should suffer, Mr. Coupland consented to retain them. The Quorn country is one that, apart from all monetary considerations (which, perhaps, have had their weight here as everywhere else), demands a ruler possessed of more than an ordinary share of tact, business-like habits, and a knowledge of men. Its visitors give little trouble of themselves—or

at all events only such trouble as an active Hon. Sec. is competent to deal with. The visitors indeed find most of the sinews of war. Did they not do so, it is only fair to assert that their presence would possess comparatively few compensating advantages, to set against the difficulties brought about by their numbers—in a country by no means best suited to the infliction of an immense field of horsemen. But—without raking up a catalogue of stumbling-blocks over which an inconsiderate and thoughtless Master of Hounds might find himself tripping at any step—it is sufficient to point out that his dynasty, to be stable and lasting, must be founded on an attention to men and detail that the many who regard the existence of an M.F.H. as a quiet and comfortable autocracy would never imagine. There is no harder-worked, or more sorely-tried, official in the kingdom than the Master of a subscription pack in a popular country. From this work and these trials Mr. Coupland has never shrunk, but has combated them with a success so widely known that encomium at my hands would be only impertinence—but for which every member of the Quorn Hunt gladly confesses to deep and lasting gratitude.

Reader! (I am now addressing only the reader at a distance.) How gladly would you, and I, have seen that gallop on Friday, have been lifted in the whirl of its quick delight out of the day-to-day stolidness of mere being, have breathed its ecstasy, and shared in its chances. *You* are perhaps biding your time in some far-off land, till your turn comes round for pink and pig-

skin in the Old Country once more. *I* am near enough to the scene of action to hear at once of each stirring event, to learn it from still excited lips, even to catch the passing enthusiasm ere the flush is off the cheek or the sparkle has left the eye. The spirits must rise, and the heart must quicken, to the recital—even though a tinge of pain (the dogged refusal of human nature to lay aside all self-regret) *will* step in to temper the thrill of sympathy. Ah, it must indeed have been a gallant burst—a quick straight gallop over wild open country—of class enough to make the leading chapter of a season, though only a single specimen page in our well-filled scrapbook of '83, '84.

To John o' Gaunt, then, a somewhat disconsolate field dragged its way in the early, and showery, afternoon of Friday—disconsolate for the news they had heard—that the flock was to lose its shepherd—and for that they had seen Barkby Holt and various minor coverts already drawn dismally blank. A third of the blackthorn in John o' Gaunt's dozen acres, be it noted, was cut away last spring; and low brushwood just hides the ground. In this barest portion a strong old fox was fast asleep, and nearly lost his brush before he could gain his legs. He woke with the pack all round him; almost knocked over a hound that was too taken aback to seize him; dashed through the very legs of the huntsman's horse; and well nigh jumped out of his bright red skin as the first view holloa of the day was poured into his astonished ears. With the demon-voice ringing through and through his distracted head, he stopped not for trick nor

thought nor parley; but bundled through the covert, out at the bottom, and away up the green slope as if the de— no, Firr and all his angels were after him. And so they were, close and sharp and cheerily—as he rose the greensward beside the railway, and made his way towards Tilton Station (as a fortnight before). The field, of even more than ordinary Friday strength, trooped

"DASHED THROUGH THE VERY LEGS OF THE HUNTSMAN'S HORSE."

down the ride and out through the ample gateway—as if one and all would be with the hounds, happen what might. And yet—and yet—again the old story—another mile found considerably less than a dozen near hounds, while the ruck toiled on—happy enough in most instances perhaps but *not with hounds*. Ill luck shut off a strong and capable section; the pace choked off a large number more—and many of the rest got in each other's way. The firstnamed, as I learned, were victimised thus —Hounds, be it remembered, kept the railway embankment just on their left. The two first fences (the one a

thorn-blocked gateway, the other a hole in a high bull-finch—the very desiderata for clubbing a mass of horse-men) brought them to a crossroad that runs from Tilton village under the railway to Marfield. Over this road a white gate led up the second rise; while a larch spinney, close beside it, for a moment clouded the movements of the pack from the straining eyes of the men behind. Thus some of the latter took the right of the plantation (towards the Halstead farm), under the impression that hounds were bending that way—and in the next field found an impassable gulf, completely cutting them off from the chase and from hope. A quarter of a mile round put them half a mile behind—and not a yard of it could they ever recover. The leaders meantime had swung across the railway with the pack (whether over a bridge, or under an arch, I can induce none I have seen to recall positively from their misty, hurried, recollection); made good the Marfield brook, by ford or easy-railed jump; and embarked on as wet and wild a stretch of old grass as the country holds. With a piping scent hounds were running as close as they could pack. Each en-closure measures half-a-hundred acres; the fences are laid and level—good at one place as at another—and the vanguard rode almost abreast. Lord Charles Beresford, Mr. Bunbury, Mr. A. Brocklehurst, Capts. Ashton, Molyneux and Smith, Count Kannitz, with Mr. Gosling and Capt. Candy—I cannot learn that there were more than one or two others, till, after a long interval, a second and stronger division rode hard in their wake. (Firr, I need scarcely add, was in his proper and accustomed

position.) But lookers-on, who proverbially—and, in foxhunting at least, veritably—see much of the game, declare that after this second batch of twenty or so, came another wide interval, and then a prolonged stream of red and black dots covering at one time quite three miles of undulating pasturage. This authority might have told me more of what went on, amid the moving mass of which he formed a late but lusty atom—had not his attention been distracted by an incident that startled and terrified him not a little. So deep and dirty was the ground after the showers of the day and the storms of the week, that to jump out of a furrow was a labour, to jump into one was a risk—enhanced by the pace and augmented by the deep plunge of those who had passed before. Landing into a quagmire, my atom extricated himself, with difficulty and a prolonged flounder: and rode in jubilaunce up the mead. But a crash and a dull flop caught his ear; and, ever ready to render help to a comrade in distress, he turned round in his saddle—to behold a citizen of Leicester and his trusty steed rolling over and over each other in the deep brown mud. All right! The man was up again, and so was the horse; philanthropy might be cast to the winds; and our friend sped on, with all the haste that a full-blown hunter, aided by a long pair of spurs but incommoded by sixteen stone of exacting horsemanship, could command. But, casting one glance more over his shoulder, the Levite was in the instant again the good Samaritan. Round he came in a jiffey; and galloped back to where the fallen one was now to be seen writhing in apparent

agony on the turf, his steed with dragging reins cropping the grass by his side. "Here! Take my flask!!" shouted the Samaritan, flinging himself from his saddle, and unsheathing a glass receptacle holding at least a very imperial pint. "For Heaven's sake, man, speak! Are you badly hurt?" And with a merry smile the object of

"HERE! TAKE MY FLASK!!"

his solicitude spoke. "Hurt? no, thanks, not at all. I'm only rubbing the rough edge of the dirt off my back! But I think I'll take a drink." So charity suffered with becoming meekness the loss of his place in the run, besides half the contents of his flask.

All this time hounds had been streaming away, at first with their heads towards the distant height of Burrough Hill, then with a bend to the right (which proved, I am told, of grateful assistance to more than one of the party struggling against the pace) as if for

Owston Village. The brook from Owston to Twyford was struck at some happy point where it was anything but formidable, scarcely even recognisable. Every rider, light or heavy, had to drive his utmost down each gentle declivity; and the latter aver hounds helped them not a little, by making the pace hottest down the hills and easing it ever so little on the brow of each ascent. It would seem as if their fox, striving his utmost to make up the wind for the Cottesmore woodlands, was driven downward and on till he had no point in the open country before him. Now he passed the brick kilns, midway between the villages of Somerby and Owston; now he reached the back of Somerby; and now he found his first momentary breathing time—while the fortunate few made the most of the check, to turn to the wind, to pat their lathering steeds on the neck (and each other, figuratively, on the back), to count their numbers, and consult their watches. I did not ask what they said, or even what they thought. I know the one (so do you; for we too have perhaps found ourselves in similar happy case); and I could guess the other—the natural outcome of "*Five and twenty minutes*, my boy, seven of us there, and not another soul in sight! I wouldn't take *five hundred*, no, not a *thousand*, for the old horse." With a burst of kindly sympathy he added, "How *you'd* have enjoyed it, old friend!" or I must have bade him leave a fool to himself, and had the rest another day (forgetting in weakness and longing that 30 to 1 had been the least odds against each successful competitor). Not that there was the glow and the go in the rest of his narrative.

They had come a four mile point already; and for another mile went heartily. But a palpable change of scent was tantamount to a probable change of foxes, on the big heavy ploughs or at the strip of plantation at the back of Pickwell. They hunted on to Whissendine, to complete their seven miles; but the vigour of the chase was never renewed, and the run ended by slow degrees. But that first spin was Leicestershire, every inch of it.

CHAPTER XVIII.

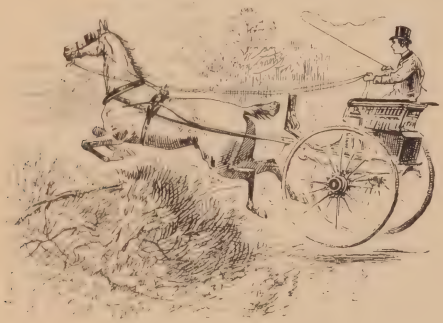
HARDER AND HARDER.

AN East wind, I fancy, loses little of its acerbity before penetrating to the Midlands, finds a weak place in as many human frames here, as on more dusty soils, shrivels our faculties and contracts our capacity for enjoyment quite as readily as in other hunting fields. Often, however, it brings with it a counteracting influence in the warming exhilarating presence of a tearing scent that allows hounds to run breast high over parched meadows or even crusted fallows. Then we forget the covert side misery, the insanity which bade us jump into spring clothing before the dog days, and the flight of fashion which induced us to give credence to the new theory that cords are preferable to buckskin. But an east wind brought no recompense with it towards the close of last week. On Friday (February 15th) with the Quorn we were kept moving all day; so actually suffered little at its hands, though we received but scanty benefits. After a cold but pretty meet at Gaddesby Hall, we found a heavy sign of early spring at Cream Gorse; and, leaving her with a blessing on the goddess Lucina, who would seem

to cast an impervious mantle round Madame Reynard in her sorest need, we found Ashby Pastures forsaken for a general gathering of the race at Thorpe Trussels adjacent. Three fields in pursuit of one of these foxes made it quite patent that a burning scent was not to be long to-day; three more fields certified to a fox to ground. Bolted him, ran and hunted him for an hour and a half, aye and hunted him to death close to where he was found. To make a story of it, however, could only be done at *per line*—a scale which is neither in keeping with mine Editor's requirements nor with the material of five days a week. I might, even with my matter of fact pen, draw ghastly pictures of what we saw and how we were terrified —now, and again, and time after time in that quiet cruise round Great Dalby. The gallant, the giddy, the fierce and the fair—for bravery, rashness, temerity, or timidity —none seemed exempt from peril and catastrophe. And we went home sorely puzzled in our minds as to whether or no the game of foxhunting was, after all, too dangerous —if not for our unworthy selves, at least for our best belongings. But such gruesome incidents are better forgotten than perpetuated. They lacked even a comic side—such as cannot but belong to even our dearest friend's dive into a dirty duckpond—a trait of the plunger that has long remained the only link between him and Her Gracious Majesty's mounted musketeers. But there is a certain monotony even in the routine of going out hunting every day in rude health and returning home unscathed —through which there have been many recent, and more or less successful, efforts to break. Sunday, however,

has generally been recognised as an off day and as more in keeping with renovation after damage than as fitting occasion for fresh hurt. So, as a matter of custom and fact, a saddle is very seldom ordered out of Melton on that day; and wheels become the more ordinary and safer medium of quiet exercise. It is by no means against the code, though, to try a new one between the shafts on the day of rest—and, moreover, it has lately become quite an approved practice to put a half-broken-down favourite into harness and "drive him sound." The Marquis was taking his recreation in this wise a few days ago; and old Lottery apparently took very kindly to the job—stepping along as sedately as if his field of vision had all his life been limited by a pair of blinkers. All went well till he arrived at the gate of the residence at which the noble coachman proposed to lunch, when Lottery was pulled up short to allow of John jumping down. But the gate opened towards him, the unaccustomed bearing rein had already chafed Lottery's mouth and temper, and the old horse began impatiently to sidle and back. The buggy in a moment hung on the very verge of the ditch, causing the affrighted owner to give a sharp tug to one rein and a smart cut to Lottery's back. This summary mode of proceeding brought the old horse exactly opposite the side fence, and to his understanding could mean but one thing. Accordingly, he took the office at once—the bit and the hated bearing rein between his teeth, and the fence in his stride—landing himself, the gig, and the gallant marquis all into the next field in undisturbed safety, though the binders were fully four feet

high, and the ditch beyond was quite wide enough to satisfy the G. N. H. Committee! The feat has not only created its little sensation within and without the walls of Melton; but has stimulated the young blood of the city to a new excitement. The annual Hunt Steeplechases had all but been abandoned. Now a fresh course has been chosen and approved, the meeting is to come off in



"HE TOOK THE OFFICE AT ONCE."

April, and a chariot-race over three miles of fair hunting country will form the not least exciting event on the card.

Monday, February 19th, brought the Quorn back to what has become quite their normal average—*a great day's sport*. The ten flying minutes in the Vale, with a fox just bolted from a drain, need scarcely be counted in the record of the day. But the next performance—another extremely fine gallop from Welby Fishpond—was of very different mark. Let me preface that the

east wind was cold as ever, but far less boisterous; the sun shone brightly, and the glass rose rapidly. Wind and crowd alike prevented their fox from taking the usual line hence into the Belvoir country; so now he set off into the heart of the grass that, till the railway came to disfigure it, Quornites held to be the best of their ground north of the Wreake. There used to be little or nothing to stop us between Welby Fishpond and Lord Aylesford's Gorse. Now those beautiful pastures of Saxelby have a railway cutting through their midst—and even the two or three bold spirits who jumped into it were fain to be content with riding down it to the station crossing. But, for all this, a bright sharp twenty minutes took us over the grass to Lord Aylesford's and over one long plough, or one clamber round, to Schoby Scoles. Three, if not four, difficult "bottoms" there were on the way—but under good leadership they were all waded or scrambled over by even the most timid of us. A worse difficulty than any one of these gullies was in waiting immediately hounds took up the running again beyond Schoby Scoles. A gate, with half its topbars broken off, became a very Gordian knot which refused to be cut, and drew the crowd into its own entanglement. Half a minute thus wasted may involve the loss of almost any quick gallop. How long this scene of confusion now lasted it would be impossible for me to say—but hounds were two fields away before the pent torrent broke forth, and nothing but a second dry fallow saved the run to many an almost broken-hearted pursuer. On regaining the grass by Ragdale village, this bold good fox turned his

head abruptly up the wind; and held it so for a sheer five miles, with hounds hard at him all the way. Leaving Hoby behind him, he chose the strongest of lines above Ashfordby village, where the fences are so thick and unbroken that even with a successful pioneer there is scarcely room for half a dozen to ride to hounds. The pioneer in this instance was Mr. Leatham on his bold and untiring grey; and as the chase moved hotly on, his string of followers grew thinner and more prolonged. Neither a division of lines near the village of Ashfordby, nor a down wind and parallel road, proved of service to those who by the pace or the intricacy of the country once found themselves choked off: and it was only after the hunt-boundary had been crossed, the hamlet of Welby repassed, and the Duke's covert of Old Hills reached, that the long train of horsemen could once more close up. And this just an hour from the find! Of course a change of foxes must have occurred on the way—though many an old traveller is nearly as strong as a foxhound in mid-February. To make matters worse, and prevent a well earned finish, two or three fresh foxes were at once afoot at Old Hills; and so, though Firr worked back to Welby Fishpond after another twenty minutes' hunting, it soon became evident that his run fox had shifted his burden on to other shoulders, and the chase was given up.

CHAPTER XIX.

OLD FRIENDS.

THE Quorn were busy and merry with two old friends on Friday, Feb. 22—doing justice to each without exacting the extreme penalty from either. Three weeks ago (you who do me the honour of skimming my jottings may remember) I wrote from the mouth of Hearsay of that gallant gallop from John o' Gaunt. Now I can tell you how it was in part reproduced on Friday; and if the sweet morsel now tasted was a fair sample of

the former feast, there needed nothing more to realise the sterling truth of Hearsay's glowing terms.

Baggrave had been the meet, on a bright and rather blustering morning. A passing storm drove our coat collars up as, soon after midday, we neared John o' Gaunt; and at once we flew to condemning weather and prospects of scent as if all hope had been washed away. And yet men seemed to know exactly what was before them. No sooner were they within a field of the covert than there ensued a general scuttle to the middle ride; while the pack was taken as usual to draw from the Tilton end of the staunch little covert. Not two minutes were we kept in doubt. The hero was at home; and lively enough this time, he darted across the ride before our faces—incurring immediately afterwards the nearest possible chances of losing the white-tipped brush he flourished so defiantly. First he ran his head right against the whip at the bottom corner; then his second effort was met by a tumultuous yell from a signal box full of pointsmen—these gallery gods being perched up aloft so as almost to overhang the covert. But all idea of the incompatibility of railways with foxhunting has long since passed away from us. We accept their presence under helpless protest—but still we hunt, and still we find room to ride. To see their railway tickets inscribed "Melton to Leicester, *viâ John o' Gaunt*" still brings a groan from sportsmen of anything like mature age—but, happily, one seldom hears them speak of shifting their quarters for lack of room to move.

The huntsman's deep-voiced appeal—mandatory in-

deed rather than supplicatory—awed into silence these noisy cherubs; the almost quivering horsemen huddled in hushed anxiety within the covert; reynard slipped through his clamorous foes, and quickly made another bold bid for safety. This time he was half-way up the first narrow grass field, ere the voice he must have remembered so well struck appallingly into his ears; followed by scream after scream that he may have deemed only the outcry of a railway engine, but which were bringing six-and-thirty fierce fleet ladies hot upon his track. How they scrambled, dodged, and darted out of covert—past a crowd that could hardly contain itself to wait their coming, so keenly did the memory of the previous chance, the previous success, or the previous disappointment assert itself. Now they are away—and in a moment clear of us all. Now you may cut and thrust, gallop and go, to your heart's content—to a burning scent and to as fast a pack as ever beat horses. The same fox, no one doubts; the same line, everyone prays. Now for putting old Hearsay to the test—and, if he told us a cracker, to jump on his back. A neat new cut-and-laid still bears the marks of where he told us five men rolled through its thorn-covered ditch abreast. That much was true, at all events, for here's a clean gap, never left by hedgecutter, for us to shoot in our stride. Ah, they are turning for Tilton and its woods, and our conjured gallop will, after all, be a very myth. No, *forrard* they are—breasting the hillside a field before us. Here's the open cross-road of which we had been told; here's the white gate staring us in the face; and here's

the little black spinney that last time split the lucky and the luckless. Good fellow, kind man, swing it cleverly and swing it wide! And innocently, scandalously, half a dozen of your comrades will crowd you out—less in malice, than in wild and wicked thoughtlessness. A bullock track bids them and the sufferer walk placidly through the side fence; and then the rush again spreads hurriedly. The old chestnut Akbar* proclaims all his ancient dash as he rushes the tall forbidding bullfinch on the brow; while we of milder metal slink through a gate beside. Halloa, Mynheer Hearsay! Here's your choked gateway—thorns, sheep tray, and a couple of ashrails to form "two on top." Good take-off, and good landing—the pack swinging across the front, and the railway bridge, about which you jumbled your evidence so culpably, now again bearing hounds and field as through a floodgate to the open pasture lands of Owston and Sowerby. *There* he goes! up the very next slope, with his head for Burrough, the pack running as if they too could see him—and we riding in all excitement of a gallop in full swing. Field after field brings us opposite Hearsay's gaps; and we bless those that went before that they made a strong country so easy. But it must have been since then that the heap of stones was shot down exactly where we must land into the Tilton and Burrough road? Twenty sets of hoofs in turn drop into it, with a clatter that turns each man in his saddle to learn what may have happened to the next comer. And

* Akbar, for some seasons past the property of Capt. Brocklehurst, formerly belonged to Sir Beaumont Dixie.

you said not a word, Mr. Hearsay, of this villainous ant-hilly and rush-covered field, over which twenty men are now spurring as fearlessly as if it were level and fair as a polo ground. Crash goes the timber out of it, with a treble but almost simultaneous report. Owston village is on their right; Somerby and miles of well-fenced prairie ridges (if you will grant the two apparently opposite adjectives) in front. Hounds, as before, are flying like pigeons; none of these simple old hedges ought to stop us; a dozen good fellows give us a ready and clever lead; and Hearsay swore there was never a brook in the line. Confound you, sir, what then do you call this? Catch my horse and be——friend me; or, if you will, pull out your sketch book and get out of Capt. John Brocklehurst's way! Now pencil in Mr. Leatham and his Monday's grey hitting off a better spot on the right, the huntsman on his big black readily accepting the office, Lord Manners, Mr. Forester, Colonel Pole Carew, Capts. Ashton, Molyneux, and Smith all in a cluster at their heels, and Mr. A. Brocklehurst near the centre of the line getting the cleanest place of all, where the nearer bank has a post-and-rail and the farther is less rugged and steep than elsewhere. This done, get forrard for Somerby Spire; and point out to me where on the former occasion you say you came to your first brief check. Here they are, at fault again! The man with the inevitable sheepdog says, as usual, "He's just afore 'em;" and adds as he catches up his panting colley, "I'd hard work to stop my old bitch from running him." Only a quarter of an hour; but already is a check verily

needed—for has it not been a fast-run race every yard of the way? A few seconds' rest will suffice us; and the struggle will commence again. Alas, no! An open drain explains the sudden check; and our brief bright scurry is at an end.

Later in the day let me take you on to the immortal Coplow, and presume that, having seen the gorse on its

"HITTING OFF A BETTER SPOT ON THE RIGHT."

side drawn blank, you have dawdled past the House in place of accompanying the hounds over the summit. Possibly, in the weakness of a nature to which the restricting hand of gout (the most impartial as he is the most severe of whippers-in) has as yet scarcely appealed, you may have found yourself blocked for one second by the sherry-tray that "stops the way" as if brought by magic. Of a sudden there is a murmur, breaking into a shout "They're away!" Away! Where? They may have left in any direction for aught we can learn from

here. And the party scattered madly, as sheep from a dog in their midst. No one knows whither to ride; but 'tis no use loitering to lament! We remember, in the sudden instinct of desperation, that twice previously in this season from the Coplow, the rough southern side, towards Billesdon, has been the direction; and at once we dive and twist through the trees and shrubs to the lower handgate. By all that is blessed and unexpected, there are the hounds, skimming the plough as twice before for the first steep brow. Three men only are near them, as we make out in our struggle through the deep clay—and these are Mr. C. Martin, Mr. H. Praed, and Downes. Over the edge of the brow hounds have disappeared from sight; and only a hurried scramble through two more hillside fences reveals them streaming away in a deep gully below. Firr dips at once into the steep valley in pursuit—the roan sinking and rising over hill and dale till in the distance he reminds one of a terrier going in and out of deep ridge-and-furrow. Mr. Charles Fitzwilliam is his only close companion; until the chase turns upwards towards Tilton Wood, and in ten minutes those who have struck the cross lane from Lord Moreton's covert become the "top o' the hunt." Lord Lonsdale's fox of a week ago is before them again this afternoon. Second editions are the order of the day: and, both forenoon and evening, history repeats itself right pleasantly. As with Lord Lonsdale,* a momentary check occurs directly Tilton

* Lord Lonsdale had an invitation-day with his pack in the Quorn country the previous week.

Wood comes in sight; and hounds race off for the wood more quickly than ever. To the one who plumbed the depth of the well-edged water-course that eventually becomes the Tilton Bottom, belonged all the pride of place till the covert was reached.

But here—at a little blind fence close to the wood—Firr met with a fall that, while costing him dear in pain and disappointment, is likely to involve quite an equal cost upon his Master and field in the loss of his invaluable services for at least several days. A rick to his back (his weak point for years) made it necessary for him to return home on wheels; and his return to work remains still in the future. If sympathy would cure, a thousand well-wishers should help him to the saddle again. The run in question went on, even prettily, for a long while after—the Master giving the pack every chance of killing their fox. And their fox was right among them in Launde Wood—but a fresh one tempted them on, to complete an eight-mile point near Prior's Coppice.

ASH WEDNESDAY, 1884.

That the Belvoir should have signalised Ash Wednesday with a gallop is less remarkable than had they failed to do so. That the custom was carried out, the proverb fulfilled, and the anniversary duly honoured, was only in keeping with what we had all been taught to expect and what so many had journeyed far to see. From Northamptonshire, Lincolnshire, Warwickshire, Nottinghamshire, Buckinghamshire, even from Yorkshire, they had come to trip it in Leicestershire, as soon

as the church bells released them and played them to a midday meet. Of whom the array of strangers may have consisted it would be impossible for an individual to ascertain or note. Our hunting field does not, unfortunately, endow even the elder boys with the privilege of accosting newcomers with "What is your name, Sir?"—and the latter were to-day far too numerous and far too widely gathered to admit of acquiring the necessary information at one's elbow. As with learning the hounds of a pack, it was easy enough to mark the individual, but a hundred to one that the person who could identify him was not within whisper-shot. We are all curious about our fellowmen; and the keeper of the log book who complains that his entry for the day is incomplete is by no means the only murmurer on such occasions. Year after year though, I notice, the Belvoir Ash Wednesday becomes a more widely attractive festival—and so, no doubt, it will continue to grow until the Duke's pack loses its beauty and power, or Gillard his skill in kennel and his fortune in the field. The following few names will serve to illustrate, but by no means to complete, the goodly company. Mr. and Mrs. C. Chaplin, Mr. and Mrs. F. Sloane-Stanley, Mrs. G. Paget, Mrs. Candy, Mr. and Miss Fenwick, Miss Wilson, Duke of Portland, Count Larische, Count Caunitz, Colonel Fryer, Colonel Pole-Carew, Major Starkey, Major Stirling, Major Paynter, Captains Amcotts, Ashton, Blair, Brocklehurst, Goodchild, Hill-Trevor, King, Middleton, Riddell, Smith, Tennent, Wickham, M. Deschamps, M. Roy, Messrs. Behrens, Beaumont, A.

Brocklehurst, C. and J. Brown, Burdett-Coutts, Crawley, Custance, Drummond, Duncan, Fisher, Forester, Goodman, F. Gosling, Hanbury, Hume, Leatham, Osborne, S. Paget, Parker, Peake, Pennington, Pryor, Rose, Shoolbred, Williamson, Smith (huntsman to Mr. G. Lane Fox), with very many others, whose names I either did not know or that do not occur to me at the moment of writing.

The men from other countries had, of course, come to Croxton Park to make, or renew, acquaintance with the fair pastures of vaunted Leicestershire—and with this result, that in a half-hour's run from Sproxton Thorns they were scarcely two minutes out of plough. Having thus satisfied themselves of the nakedness of the land, they were in a mood to accept with gratitude any small modicum of sport that so inferior a county might be able to afford them before nightfall. So far they had gathered themselves for an effort as unnecessary and out of place as that of a strong man blowing soap bubbles. They had already witnessed the natives ride over a hound or two in the open, and jump on each other more freely than in any country on this side the channel. Of all this they made a quiet note, either with a view to retailing in full at to-morrow's covertside at home, or perhaps with the idea, should occasion offer, of for once indulging themselves also in the obvious license, as the afternoon went forward. So they followed on to Coston Covert, again to gaze on a sea of plough all round them, and to find the *habitués* of the scene at once lighting up a second cigar, to consume the long period of

waiting evidently accepted as customary. That a horn sounded on the second up the wind (S.E., the best, perhaps, of all directions) seemed to take natives and strangers alike by surprise. But the fox had found himself; the big doghounds were scattered over the covert, and there was time enough for everyone to be at the starting-point before the pack were on his line. (The pack, did I say? No, a moiety at the most. The gallop was half over ere the rampant phalanx opened sufficiently to let the others up.) But with such a scent, wafted down the breeze in their faces, I question if the tailhounds could ever have caught the body—till the wire traps to which we shall presently come had enclosed one and all of the hindering horsemen—had the field waited yet another three minutes, which in common justice to them, it is only fair to add, they had not the slightest intention of doing. A stalwart bullfinch checked wild ardour for a moment, till a well-known and too-often-quoted friend swept the strong rails from the chief opening, as radically as a cowcatcher would lift a few sticks from an engine's path. Over three rough pastures then raced the crowd—the deep-sticky furrows searching out the power of their mounts, and a fourth field a very nest of pitfalls with its new made drains and its half-visible watercourses. Thus for the village of Wymondham—with grief, hurry, and happiness in their due proportions by the way. Suddenly it became necessary—at least so thought all the leading competitors—to jump into a deep narrow lane which hounds had at least threatened to cross. So in they jumped; till the lane would hold no

more, and the pressure became so dense that they could neither open the gate out, nor rein back to release themselves from the *cul de sac*. But they did get out at last; and scurried on above Wymondham, thinking to ride for Garthorpe or Freeby, and with the greater part of the pack by this time fairly free to hunt its fox in peace. WIRE, was the cry above the village; WIRE was the same accursed sound, and sight, beyond. (Is there no man of influence and good-feeling in the parish of Wymondham—or are they *all* cold-blooded and bloodthirsty?) Our fox was plainly in view as we approached the first murderous strand; and he had gained little on the hounds when we were penned by the second snare. Two or three forward riders were all but caught by the cruel wire; some few others knew of, and avoided, its propinquity; and Mr. Alec Goodman in particular made an excellent cut, by dashing through the village and hitting a ford in the brook below. The body of others, when extricated, found their path once more barred by wire along the water. Rounding this by a right détour, they squeezed through a bullfinch and forded the stream—then sat down to ride for the fairest and quickest ten minutes of the gallop. This brought them to Teigh, to the very same farm whereat the Quorn killed their fox last Kirby-Gate-day. Down the hillside at this moment, and across the right front, came Mr. Goodman, hat in hand as he rode at the draggled brush of the beaten fox—one hound racing to the view, the others straining to the warm scent. By the side of the railway, and past Whissendine station, went the fray—hounds somewhat

intermingled with, and cut off by, the horsemen, but the head of the pack chasing their fox hotly into Wymondham Roughs. With flagging horses men were glad enough to make use of gates and ford, and gallop round to the Stapleford crossing. No, he was *not* over the railway—declared gatekeepers and platelayers; and half the hounds were already through the covert, their heads up in puzzled inquiry. *Tallyho!!* *Tallyho!* came Gillard's joyful scream, as he spied his game prone in a hedgerow, twixt us and the covert. *Tallyho!* and in another moment the big dogs had rent and torn him into many a fragment in mid-field. Thirty minutes without a check!—*twenty-seven* say some. But the margin was too narrow to nurse dispute, and the fun too good to admit of cavil. Another Ash Wednesday is scored to the Belvoir; another Ash Wednesday we owe to our Duke.

CHAPTER XX.

THE CURATE IN SPRING.

FRIDAY the 29th of February may of course be looked upon as a Leap Year gift, an extra day to our life and to the current season. In traditional fancy we connect Leap Year with the upsetting in sundry ways of the relations of the sexes. In rumour and fact we even hear of such topsy-turvey celebrations as Leap Year Balls, whereat the timid male has to wait his turn to be asked to dance, to sit out, or to go down to supper. But such frivolous subversion of social economies has not yet been suggested for the hunting field. The ladies on Leap-Friday were very forward, it is true; but only with the welcome prominence that has long proved their ability in riding to hounds, and shown that —seat and dress being the same—they would ask for no lead, require no suggestion, on the part of the rougher sex. The matter of seat and saddle would seem to be so absolutely fixed by ancient custom (I confess to ignorance of any other reason) that it is hopeless to expect a revolution in this respect—at least, till the word *fashion* has been altogether expunged from woman's dictionary, and she has become a more unfettered agent than she pro-

bably aspires or cares to be. But, granted that she is compelled to adhere for life to the cramped and unnatural position invented in deference to the overwrought sensitiveness of her grandmothers or grandfathers, she is still at liberty—indeed, by instances lately so numerous and appalling, she is almost forced—to seek some alteration or adjustment of habit, that shall give her in some measure immunity from needless and peculiar risk. Without dwelling at length on a subject that of late has become so painfully patent, or discussing details with which I have no business to meddle in print, it is sufficient to say that, here at all events, the sight of ladies hanging head downward from their pommels has come to be considered the most prominent evil in connection with the hunting field, and a standing reproach against the custom and the ingenuity of the day. Men of tolerable calibre will stand a number of bad falls in their own person, without loss of nerve or keenness. But they find that such accidents as are now constantly befalling their lady relatives and friends upset their equanimity and disturb their enjoyment far more than any casualty to themselves. Having discovered this, they find the voice of self-interest coming into play, and bidding them bestir themselves for their own comfort's sake. Accordingly, there has recently been a great outcry on the subject of habit-skirts. Lords, masters, husbands, and admirers have all been exerting themselves, and have had as much to say on the matter as their respective positions would allow. The three former—at any rate those whose rulership is not merely

a farcical manner of speech—have gone beyond mere protest, and insisted on the adoption of sensible means of escape. With the habitmaker—who, after all, by his skilful and tortuous cutting that envelopes each leg and pommel with such marvellous closeness, is really the author of half these entanglements—he dare not meddle; for does not the fit and sit of a habit constitute one of the great, universal, and unavoidable, rivalries of the day? Now, the feminine breeches-and-boots of Anno Domini 1884 are as little likely to shock the eye of the chance observer, as the mention of them is to bring a blush to the face of the fair wearer herself when ordering them. They are known to exist, in all propriety as in all necessity—and, as far as the requirements of delicacy and possibly even of elegance are concerned, might well dispense with their dangerous coverings, the cause of these accidents. Let this be as it may. The order has gone forth; the method has met with acceptance at the hands of matron and maid; and, please Heaven, we shall be frightened no more. Habit-skirts are to be fastened loosely at the waist; and in time of extreme danger ladies must be content, not only for their own sakes but for ours, to cast them adrift. Smile not, ye ancient satyrs—the loosened zone of modern classics will, even to your ribald minds, convey nothing to move your mirth.

Twelve o'clock meets, and an enormous influx of strangers, as unmistakeably presage the coming end as any less technical symptoms of spring. Could we shut our eyes to lambs, primroses, and the rusty particolours

of our well worn stud—we should still fail to attain oblivion of sultry noon-tide at the rendezvous, and, in a run, of the crowd of unfamiliar forms rendering each line of gaps and gates less our own than ever. In the homely isolation of November we form of ourselves a little multitude. In the unrestricted popularity of March our local world is almost lost in a swollen stream of visitors. Individually the latter are welcome and charming. Collectively they may become—well, too much of a good thing. In Leicestershire it has never been the custom to cavil at—still less to resent—the presence of strangers. We are not prompted to throw the metaphorical "'arf brick" by riding jealous of—or, as the ungracious practice is termed elsewhere, of "riding at" —them: but rather regard their coming as a compliment to a country whose reputed charms have brought them hither.

Vicarious a sport as foxhunting must always be, it is never more so than in March, when it has to contend against numberless adverse chances of subject and climate. At least every second fox is not fit to run—and quite three out of four won't. At this time of the year they consider they have other occupations, and are apt to decline altogether to enter into the fun of the thing. From the experience of months that are past, or out of a forethought for months to come, they are acquainted with every available earth or drain in the neighbourhood—and accordingly seldom fail to turn this knowledge to account, when called upon for distasteful exertion. The coverts, too—especially during a winter

as open as the one nearly at an end—have been so constantly worried that they have lost all attractions for a fox; and, in a March so lamblike as this, a warm furrow, or at most a hedgebottom, offers quite as comfortable quarters. Then, except in abnormal and unsettled weather, the heat is likely to be too great or the cold too severe, the soil too dusty and the turf too hard. The very air, redolent of flowers, seems repellent to foxhunting. We are easily discouraged and readily become slack—and very probably miss the sport that comes when least expected. This year the foxhunter and the farmer (whose interests are in reality indissoluble) are not treated with equal indulgence. The latter complains that his land is so wet he cannot, as he terms it, "get on it"; while the former, finding it still excellent riding, is apt to imagine that this is the *summum bonum* desired by all parties, and congratulates himself only too loudly.

Friday, the 7th instant, illustrated many of the disadvantages and difficulties of March, but a run of the highest class was the outcome of Monday, the 10th, when the Quorn were at Widmerpool New Inn, on the Nottinghamshire border of their country. The field consequently was not of the same giant proportions as on the previous Friday in their Leicester district. Yet in this comparatively wild region (may I be permitted so to term it, without offence to those whose presence is so powerful in mitigating its savagery?) we are accustomed to go a hunting only with a few, and look upon it, indeed, as affording the one weekly escape from a crowd. Now there must have been a hundred or two to see The Curate

drawn. The famous covert was silent as the grave for a full quarter of an hour or more. Blackthorn and gorse alike had apparently been duly searched, and searched in vain—when a solitary whimper broke the spell, and a ready fox cut short suspense. He had evidently matured his plan of action beforehand—founding it possibly on the result of previous trials. He had no taste for the northern plough; nor, on the other hand, did he intend to run his head against the baneful of carriage and foot folk, that apparently cut him off from the best of the Vale of Belvoir. Setting his head southward, in a direction that meant nothing definite unless it might be Old Dalby Wood, he led us for a mile alongside the Melton Railway; then, turning sharper than at a right angle, he twisted over the Widmer-pool-and-Broughton road near the latter village—by this manœuvre effectually evading the caravanserai above mentioned. The sudden movement had another result—disastrous or fortunate as the case might be. It entirely readjusted the order of going with a great proportion of the riders. Thus they on the right flank—whatever their previous position—found themselves at once in the extreme rear; while few became so well placed as those who with an indifferent start were thundering up the road. The scent had already proved its power; and hounds were already showing that they could glide over this difficult and strongly fenced grass-country far more readily than a cumbrous crowd of horsemen. Truly it was an exceptional hunting-day—the air clear, sharp, keen and quiet, after a night broken by storms of snow and rain. The

ground was surface-laden with wet; but the storms were all past, the sky wore an even face, and the glass was rising steadily.

From the brow crowned by the road, the Vale opens downwards in chequered ridges of steep green turf, till the eye reaches the lower level, to rest on a flat unbroken vista stretching away to the eastern horizon. On the right flank, however, and some half dozen miles away, rise the boundary hills of Holwell and Clawson, continued in those of Harby and the Belvoir Woods. Down these first steep pitches hounds were now speeding like sea-birds over a storm-tossed sea—their white forms now dipping out of sight, now rising for some moments, to disappear again. And what were most of us doing? Why, taking our turn with *too* many others—first to plunge through the only gap that could help us out of the road, then to dribble, perforce, in single file in the line of hounds. There was no escape. Each sturdy fence presented only one loophole; this had been promptly seized by those in front, and the others had nothing for it but to follow in leisurely distraction. To make up ground through a field of horsemen is at any time an uphill task; when the country is so strong as only to admit of progress in a single string it is an absolute impossibility. By which—and what has gone before—it will be rightly assumed that the man who has to tell the tale was not quite where he wished to be. And many better than he (for are we not all of us tailors in turn?) were in similar predicament—working as part of a machine, riding as men in a dream, ever pushing on

and ever hindered, with all action trammelled, yet powerless to shake off the fetters. Hounds were perhaps but a couple of fields before them; but, shut out of sight by lofty hedges, they might as well have been a mile away. A looker-on no doubt sees much of the game; but what he sees from such a point of view as this is calculated neither to edify nor to encourage him. Now he has to rein up short, while a friend, after taking for quite fifty yards a deliberative position on his horse's neck, leaves that to roll rabbit-like from furrow to furrow. The loose horse utterly declines to be caught—preferring rather to pursue the Master with dangerous closeness over the following gap. As, however, he has already flung both his patent-safety-stirrups out of their sockets and left them a quarter of a mile apart, perhaps he would not be of much use to anybody if he could be caught. The very next fence affords another excellent proof of the value of these inventions, in the stage of perfection they have at present attained. Dirt-stained and mud-besmeared, a second comrade rises from beyond a hedge, which in due course—*i. e.*, after some-one has refused, someone else has tumbled over, and a third someone has stuck fast in—we hope yet to make the means of gaining upon hounds. A grin flashes across his plastered face—but it is no grin of holy joy, nor even of thankful appreciation for the inquiry shouted. It is a grin of savage temper, such as we had never thought to see disfiguring those fashionable features. He is not hurt, nor for the moment is he suffering for the loss of his pride of place—still less for his very funny appearance. But both his—

oh, such language!—stirrups are gone, probably buried in the ditch, and for the moment he is a dangerous lunatic. Men whose years well-nigh double mine tell me that the late Lord Forester would not even allow the spring bars of his stirrup-sockets to be left down (a precaution that I fancy few of our generation tempt Providence by neglecting), lest a lost stirrup should result in a lost run! And after this and other recent Sportsman's Exhibitions in our immediate locality, I am inclined to think that the old lord's practice if reckless was at least reasonable.

Well, somehow—after passing thus through peril and by-play—we reached the lower Vale—hounds now some three hundred yards before us, bending apparently a trifle to the right, with a dozen red-coated riders and as many black in near attendance. Happy thought! the country is now open, and the fences apparently fair. Bend to the right too; cut straight to the head, and be at once "at the top o' the hunt"! No sooner said than done, by twenty eager men. One nice easy jump, two ditto, three ditto—one more, and we shall be with them again! Silly of us to have been dispirited so readily! Oh, soul of old Nimrod! What's this? The Broughton brook—a great hedge-guarded chasm, not to be jumped for miles! Those fellows in front have hit the bridge, and given you—I mean us—a slap in the face that will last us many a day. Now you must just gallop back and after them, or make a longer circuit yet to a distant ford still more to the right. Oh, the fortune of foxhunting! And yet, even in rugged

Leicestershire—with its deep watercourses and rough bottoms—it is held to be the better rule (except of course in "High" Leicestershire proper and impracticable) to ignore the country in advance, and trust to fox and hounds, that they may lead you a rideable line.

But, at Sherbrooke's Gorse in the Vale, the pace that had been maintained for twenty minutes was interrupted long enough for the body of pursuers to recover their ground—before the chase went on, straight and almost up-wind, to Clawson Thorns. The southern edge of the Vale was now gained; but still the hunt pushed forward, reaching Piper Hole Gorse (a six-mile point) in forty minutes—which we consider quite good going in this our country of low degree. Here a fresh fox jumped up; the pack divided almost exactly in half, each section running its fox to ground—the one a mile or two farther on the Harby Hills, the other, after about five-and-forty minutes' more hard running, round Clawson, Holwell, &c., at Old Hills. The former fox may probably have been the original starter from The Curate, for he only just carried his brush to ground in time. The latter, too, was nearly tired out; but managed always to keep his distance in front. Altogether, the run was undoubtedly great and good.

I wish, by the way, that Mr. Sturgess could have been posted in a certain road not far from Clawson Thorns, as the chase swept across in the height of its career, and when the pace was thoroughly "beginning to tell." Seven couple suddenly glanced over the lane, to the astounding delight of a knot of horsemen, who had not

seen hounds for half an hour till they now flashed noisily and unexpectedly upon them. So excited was one of these hitherto luckless competitors, that, jumping to the conclusion his turn had come at last, he set his horse at the lofty hedge beside him, and bade him carry him to glory. But the good steed had not so readily caught

"AND SHOT HIM INTO THE GRAVE OF BRIARS."

the enthusiasm; he refused to jump either at the same conclusion or at the forbidding bullfinch presented to him, and forthwith entombed himself and his excitable master in the brambly ditch preceding it. At that very moment there dashed into the road, in all the ardour of heated rivalry, another champion, who no doubt had been bearing the brunt of battle all the while the last-named had been cooling his heels in the lane. But he, it seemed, perceived not that his bold leap was to land him into a road. His clever hunter did, though; ducked

his head as he popped round—and shot him, too, into the grave of briars. To officiate at the burial, even with the apparently unseemly pantomime of a double somersault, who more appropriate than the fearless minister—whose good grey was as yet only half tired of cutting out the work for weak sinners, and had still at least two falls left in him? The huntsman next jumped steadily in, and even in the hurry of the moment was cool enough to perceive the advantage of opening a gate out. The Colonel,* however, had not risen at six that morning and travelled all the way from London to ride a four-year-old, for nothing! So he flicked in and he flicked out, jumped another rasper fifty yards on, and disappeared. So they passed. And this is unembellished fact.

* Col. Pole-Carew.

CHAPTER XXI.

DRYING UP!

IMPORTANT and valuable a section of the year as March may represent to numerous interests, I fancy many Masters of Hounds, owners of horses, and certainly all grooms, would gladly see it wiped off the calendar. Huntsmen might not; for they would cheerfully hunt all the year round, making no bones of the state of the ground, caring nothing for their own, but ready to hunt a fox at any and all times as a bulldog is ready to fight. Otherwise they, too, would willingly throw up the sponge, and surrender the game as not worth the candle—when it becomes a matter of a fox leaving no more scent on a fallow than a swallow that has skimmed it, and when every road or gateway insists upon hounds throwing up their heads instanter. This is the time (when isn't it, though?) to thank our stars we belong to a grass country, or on the other hand to bring appreciation to bear on the woodlands. The turf still holds plenty of wet for a scent; while the woods will, of course, remain undried till Midsummer. Even on the grass the huntsman is far more directly the motive agent now than at any other

period. Hounds may rattle on heartily across a mile or two of damp turf; but those inevitable "few acres for turnips" (the which roots, by the way—or their equivalent substitutes—might always be bought for half the price from afar) are certain to throw the pack into his hand. Reynard, meanwhile, may have turned aside from the rough fallow as naturally as a bather from sharp shingles; may have seen the shepherd in attendance on his ewes just beyond, or may have even mistaken a white mottled cow in the sunshine for a Meltonian on the watch. Any of these terrors, real or imaginary, would be quite sufficient to make him double in his course and so leave the ploughed field at the most unexpected point. The huntsman, meanwhile, has only probabilities for his guidance, sees neither shepherd nor dog, and is still less likely to make any mistake as to the identity of a good subscriber at this period of fruition. Accordingly he carries his hounds quickly round to the likely point, and —unless his instinct be of that abnormal character to which we are occasionally and happily treated—only recovers the line on his last and most hopeless effort. (Parenthesis. Oh, what a fate must be that of a plough-country huntsman in March!)

At the same time, huntsmen can *afford* to take far more, and greater, liberties with their pack than in the earlier months of the season. Every hound now knows, or should know, not only his work, but that when called he is called to the line of his fox; therefore, instead of losing heart, he gains fresh hope and interest as he finds

himself lifted forward out of his difficulties. The "silent system" may be well enough, and is in theory at all events quite unassailable. But a man who acts rigidly on the silent system would assuredly never make a run in droughty March—unless you gave him an east wind, a close woodland, an open moorland, or a straight fox in a purely grass country.

Friday last, March 21, was an illustration. The Quorn had a long and excellent hunting run—all praise to the hounds; but more to the man who held them forward, seldom by information, much by instinct, but more of necessity quickly grasped. Bearing in mind that time lost on the way was never to be regained, and that hounds when unable to help themselves must be promptly helped, he kept the ball rolling at a rate that never allowed his fox breathing time—and so made a run which in the hands of a dullard would have never even budded. Great Dalby-cum-Gartree Hill had for the last time been the formula. A vixen had dallied with the pack in covert, while a traveller was packing his portmanteau for a journey. Sex and deportment guaranteed, he soon had the sound and substance of pursuit in his wake, and we were climbing the Dalby and Burrough heights, under a summer sun. How we panted up the acclivities—perhaps even striding up the steepest ascents on our own unaccustomed and unmuscular limbs—caught breath on the Punchbowl, or arrived too late to catch aught else than a glimpse of hounds and huntsman vanishing beyond the farther rim, is but a variation of

an oft-painted picture—a big sun for the nonce being added to, and a haze of yellow light pervading, the usually quiet but rugged landscape. The Punchbowl to Ranksboro' is an old-fashioned Cottesmore line—grass and gates being the prevailing features. But here and there with some arid acres of plough came also assistance prompt and capable. We were kept galloping; and,

"PUZZLING HIS TROUBLESOME PURSUERS."

if once behind, galloping hard—till we reached Cold Overton Hall, which foxes would seem to regard as a hare does a well-recognized smeuse. *E.g.*, the first little episode of the Cottesmore season was the run of a fox through the conservatory, across the drawing-room, out over a tableful of Old Dresden, and through a pane of plate-glass—not at all because he was beat and distressed, but in order that he might put his knowledge of locality to the best advantage in puzzling his

troublesome pursuers. The latter very fortunately hit off the point at which Reynard had landed out amid fragments of glass, before they could make the line good into the drawing-room—or the ruin among the china shepherdesses might have rivalled the horrors of the sacking of Troy. But to-day the stableyard was his thoroughfare—or his idyllic wooden horse—to convey him through the walls and on to Ranksboro' Gorse. The Cottesmore Master was here to see the foreigners fairly enter, and to view a fox (I fear one of his own) stealing away beyond. But it was not a day to squander time on fruitless inquiry. A fresh fox on a dry and fine day is as difficult to distinguish by his appearance as a fresh egg—the test of eating not always being applicable. At any rate this fox asserted himself as yet unfit for killing; and, as he in course of time betook himself out of the reach of investigation, there can be little doubt he proved his point—though in a slow hunt by Whissendine and Ashwell his opponents did all that was possible to maintain the contrary.

Riding to hounds during the current week has been an indulgence to which even those who partook of it most readily scarcely denied such terms as suicidal, reckless, shortsighted and hardhearted. Having dubbed it with these epithets in the abstract, and assumed a virtuous demeanour as they clattered the roadside to covert, or sauntered over the blocks of iron mud which now form the gateways, they waited only to hear hounds open—then at once cast all considerations of prudence and

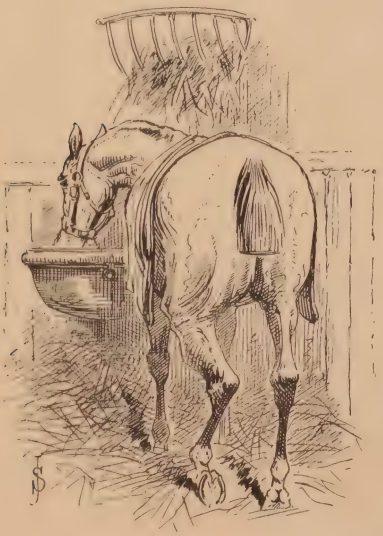
humanity to the nor' east wind, and banged their poor steeds along at the tail of the pack. Young horses would only awake to the bitterness of the ordeal when, after landing lightly once or twice on to velvety turf, their next wide spring perhaps brought them with a loud resounding concussion on to ground baked to very stone. The cruel shaking might not succeed in cowing them at the moment; but, depend upon it, it would not be wiped out of memory for many a day, even should no more immediate effect become apparent. The old horses would in many instances have none of it—the boldest of them whipping round with a vehemence as alarming as it was sometimes comical in its results, or, worse still, taking a fall as a deliberate alternative. The Quorn on Monday last, March 24th, ran more than fairly for twenty minutes from Willoughby Gorse; and a very sizeable little field scampered after them to, and beyond, the village of Wysall—refusing to recognize that the soil was in anything but a pleasantly normal condition till a check ensued, not far from Widmerpool. Then, and only then, did the peculiarities of soil and temperature seem to dawn upon them; and they mopped their foreheads and betook themselves to gates. Little more was done that day; though, with a brace of foxes at the Curate, probably only the ill luck of hounds hitting first upon the vixen robbed them of a run, perhaps of another spin across the Vale. It was not difficult, though, to extract a large amount of enjoyment even from that brief midday hunt. We take our pleasure now much as amid the more

playful episodes of cubhunting (not the early mob-him-and-taste-him period)—cantering quietly from gate to gap, absolved at last from all shame in our cowardice, and watching hounds, like Osman Digna does his fighting men, from afar—or, as we prefer to term it in our irreverence for those who lived and rode before the world seemed made only for us, "like good old-fashioned sportsmen." There seemed to be quite a fair scent, too, on Monday—as indeed there has been throughout the week, since the dry wind has shifted round from hot sou'-west to chilly nor'-east. The exigencies of spring have on recent occasions introduced us to a mixed pack—instead of its being composed as usual almost exclusively of one sex or the other. In my comparatively worthless opinion this is a great improvement, in most ways except appearance. The soundest and most humorous of all judges of hunting advocated "a few couple of dogs to correct the frivolity of the bitches." Even this much is seldom granted—a couple or two of little dogs alone being told off to the lady pack, in the same way that a similar number of overgrown bitches are sent out with the dog pack. I would go farther than this; and run about an equal number of either sex. If only as a matter of music, the result would be welcome. But beyond this, I believe the leading faults of each would be noticeably corrected. (I am by no means alluding to any particular pack of hounds.) The ladies by themselves, as every tyro knows, flash very readily over the line, even on a hot scent—either from over anxiety or from inborn

jealousy one of another. On the other hand, they are much more ready to swing to their huntsman, make their own cast infinitely quicker, and in a run will extract more pace out of indifferent material. The dogs by themselves, again, are often headstrong, frequently careless, and easily discouraged; they do not enjoy a big field, and the aspersion has even been cast upon them that "they don't like being jumped upon." Natural as this objection on their part would seem to be, it is in sober reality a decided drawback—as much so as in the case of a steeplechase rider, who has taken to looking over his shoulder as he comes to his fences. Neither the one nor the other cares to go through his horses. Between the lady pack and their brothers, the one for choice—give me the former, especially among the thick fences and crowded fields of the midlands. But better still, I believe, if we could see the two worked together in about equal proportion. The ladies would be steadier; the dogs would be quicker, handier, and sharper; the cry would be merry and easily heard; and we should kill more foxes.

The retirement of Mr. Coupland is a loss to the Quorn country that has for some time been imminent, but only now becomes an accomplished, and very regrettable, fact. For fourteen years Mr. Coupland has held the reins, and handled them with unrivalled tact and success—leaving us under an obligation that is heartily and universally recognized. A successor has now come forward in the person of Lord Manners; who at the Hunt meeting on Saturday last was elected with glad acclamation. As a

keen foxhunter, bold rider, and popular county gentleman the new Master is hopefully welcomed both by the members of the Hunt and by the farmers; and with all details of the country left in excellent working order by Mr. Coupland, I fancy he has no difficult—but a very enviable—task before him.



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